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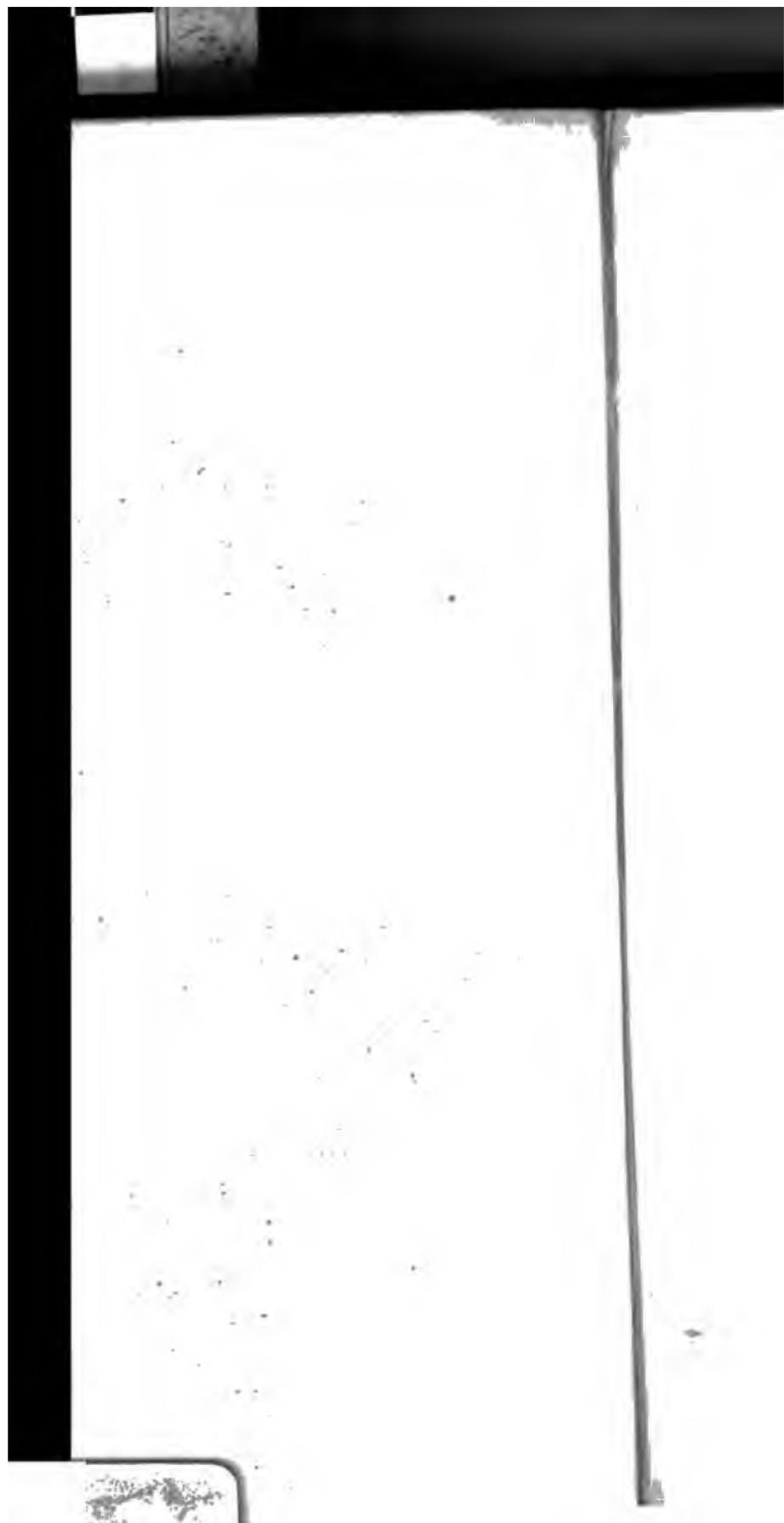
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THE
BOSOM FRIEND.
A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“THE GAMBLER’S WIFE,” “THE YOUNG PRIMA DONNA,”
&c., &c., &c.

“A bosom serpent—a domestic evil!”

Perr.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
T. C. NEWBY, 72, MORTIMER ST., CAVENDISH SQ.

—
1845.



THE
BOSOM FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

“ Behind yon hill, so steep and high,
Down in the lowly glen,
There stands a castle fair and strong
Far from the abode of man.”

*A letter from the Honorable Claud Hamilton, to
the Honorable Mrs. Gordon.*

“ DEAR MADAM,

“ You are I believe already
aware, that your brother, the late Lord de
Crespigny, before his death, appointed me

guardian to his children, in conjunction with his valued friend, Colonel Vavasour; at the same time expressing a wish, that in the event of Lady De Crespigny's death, during the minority of his daughters, you might be consulted concerning the personal superintendence of their education. That melancholy catastrophe having taken place, I have presumed to write to you, to request your advice concerning the future establishment of the young Baroness and her sister.

" Shirley Hall will continue to be their abode, according to the directions of the late lord, and of course it will be necessary that the children should have some one to reside with them, qualified in every way to supply, as far as it is possible, the place of the parents they have lost. My own large family, and position in life, of course, make it impossible that I can take upon myself that office. Colonel Vavasour, a young and unmarried man, and likely to be abroad for

many years, is also totally out of the question. Now, you, my dear madam, the nearest relative of these young orphans, and unincumbered with ties, I can picture to myself, (although it is many years since we met) the person most fully qualified to undertake a task—I may, indeed, style it—a labor of love—bringing with it, however, certainly much responsibility. I would fain entreat you to consider, if it would be disagreeable or inconvenient to you, to make Shirley Hall your home, and to act a mother's part towards your orphan nieces? Forgive me, for thus intruding upon you, with a suggestion of such great import. Should however, any feeling or circumstance interfere with your power of fulfilling my proposal, you will I trust, kindly lend me your counsel and assistance, in forming some plan for the future welfare of the dear children committed to our care, I am, &c., &c."

This was the substance of the letter which

reached the widowed Mrs. Gordon, in the retirement of a secluded part of Scotland, where, with a heart deeply wounded by the loss of the beloved partner of her youthful days, she had for the last two years buried herself far from the world and its affairs; and having no children for whose interest its smiles or remembrance might be valuable, she endeavoured to seek consolation from the true source of comfort, endeavouring successfully, to make for herself objects of interest, in doing good to the poor and needy neighbours surrounding her abode. And in this solitude the pleasures of literature formed an occupation of unfailing delight to the intellectual mind of Mrs. Gordon.

It is repugnant when we have chalked out a plan of life, and have just begun to accustom ourselves to its calm routine, to receive a sudden *bouleversement* of our ideas by the suggestion of a new field of action, in which our future energies are to be employed; but Mrs.

Gordon never allowed the calls of duty to be superseded by those of inclination—and a duty she truly deemed the present demand upon her consideration.

After a faint struggle with her feelings and habits, she determined to go forth from her tranquil privacy, and enter into the more active duties, of protectress to the orphan children of a brother, who once she had dearly loved, and whose dying request she considered sacred.

A few weeks after Mr. Hamilton's letter reached Mrs. Gordon she had quitted Scotland and repaired to London, where she remained a short time at the house of Mr. Hamilton, both in order to arrange her own affairs, and to learn every particular connected with her future establishment in the home of her young nieces.

Mr. Hamilton preceded Mrs. Gordon by a few days to prepare for her reception; and on a sombre day towards the end of October, she

found herself journeying towards the ancient seat of the De Crespignys, situated in one of the midland counties; Mr. Hamilton met her at the last stage, and they proceeded together to the Hall.

About an hour's drive brought them to its gates. They entered the long, straight avenue of stately oaks, and giant chesnut trees, whose solemn shades gave to the imagination, the semblance of "green cathedral aisles."

The carriage proceeded slowly down the ascent, the wind sounding solemnly among the branches, and the rooks cawing from the tree-tops.

The situation of the mansion, which stood in a hollow, was singularly wild and lonely, surrounded by woods and hills; it appeared as if doomed to perpetual seclusion, and as Mrs. Gordon caught sight of the large, irregular edifice, looking like a black mass against the darkening sky, an involuntary shudder passed

through her frame, as the thought presented itself, that before her she beheld her future home ! Had Mrs. Gordon been superstitious, the strange feelings which crept over her mind might have indicated no good omen for the future.

But the good lady was weary, and not a little nervous at the idea that she was soon to behold, for the first time, beings with whom her future lot was to be so closely linked.

This emotion was not unnoticed by her companion, who exclaimed,

“ No very lively looking abode, I confess, my dear friend ; something in the Udolpho style, certainly, but ladies are, I believe, generally fond of these kind of ancient places ; there is a romantic feeling attached to the impression which excites the imagination. However,” Mr. Hamilton continued with an anxious air of kind solicitude, “ I trust, my dear madam, that with all your numerous re-

ever particularly attractive in any way, whilst Francesca is a perfect little angel already. But here we are, my dear lady, and you will have an opportunity of forming your own opinion of your nieces."

As Mr. Hamilton pronounced these last words, the carriage drove clattering under the projecting gateway, the hollow echoes breaking a silence which was almost awful. It entered the court-yard surrounding the house, and stopped before the portal, over which frowned the escutcheons of the last Baron and his deceased lady.

"Where are the young ladies?" Mr. Hamilton hastily asked of the servant who admitted them, as he assisted Mrs. Gordon to alight—and being told that they were in the library, he gave her his arm, and hurried along an arched and lofty hall; so spacious that it was difficult at first to discern its bounds, with its music gallery—large chimney shafts—pictures—huge gothic bow window, and all

the appurtenances belonging to that noble feature of our ancient mansions. There seemed to reign over all around, an air of such profound stillness and gloom, that Mrs. Gordon could not help feeling a movement of compassion for the two young beings, who, having had their minds saddened and subdued by the awful events, which, at such short intervals, had occurred within those walls, had been left comparatively alone—without any of that tender care, so necessary to cheer and solace their bereaved hearts. Her spirit yearned towards the motherless girls, and she earnestly resolved to endeavour to the utmost of her power, to fill the place of the parents they had lost.

CHAPTER II.

" Oh happy child who lives to mirth
And joy of thine own on this sinful earth,
Whose heart like a lonely stream keeps singing.
Or like a holy bell in ringing.

* * * * *

Lo! sadness by the side of joy."

WILSON.

HAVING passed from the hall, Mr. Hamilton stopped at the foot of the large, oaken staircase, and gently opened one of the doors which stood on either side; then, putting his finger to his lips, he entered softly, signing to Mrs. Gordon to do the same. A large

screen stood before the entrance ; concealed by its ample folds, they remained for a moment, and thus could unperceived survey the interior of the apartment.

To convey an idea to our readers of the impression which Mrs. Gordon received by the first *coup d'œil*, we must give a slight sketch of the apartment and its occupants.

The library was a long, spacious room, dark with the time worn lore of ages, which lined its carved, oaken walls—the furniture bearing the massive form of other days. The light broke but faintly through the small paned windows, the upper parts stained with the painted arms of the family, and with the initials of the sovereign, in whose reign they had first been granted. About the centre of the room, on a high-backed massive chair, her eyes fixed on the volume which lay on the reading desk before her, sat a girl, apparently about fifteen years old. Sombre as was the appearance of the room, no less so was the

expression of her countenance, as she pursued her occupation with less of apparent interest, than gloomy abstraction.

Her cheek was pale, but not fair, and the dull, dark hair braided on her brow, joined to the deep mourning which she wore, gave it a still darker hue, and as she sat, never once lifting her long eyelashes, nor appearing in the least to heed—or partake in the sounds of merriment which were ringing close to her ears, she looked indeed a fit personification of the spirit of that gloomy chamber. But, as some obscure, shaded spot is rendered the more striking by contrast with a neighbouring feature, upon which a sunbeam is casting its bright radiance, so it was in the present instance—for near her was one as different certainly as light from darkness.

A little girl of tender age was kneeling a few yards distant, playing with a beautiful Italian greyhound. Her white arms raised, above its head she held a ball, with

which she provoked its graceful bounds to reach the tempting plaything — and then flinging it in the air, the quiet room echoed with her merry bursts of laughter, as the animal scampered after the rolling treasure, whilst by her side, watching with dignified condescension the gambols of the giddy pair, sat an enormous Newfoundland dog. The hair of this child also was very dark, but as bright as the raven's wing, and its jetty waves seemed to reach, in her kneeling position, nearly to the ground, giving an almost marble like appearance to her skin ; the delicate rose tint on the cheek, and the deeper coral of the lips, forming a beautiful contrast to the pure white, with which it was surrounded. Careless grace was in every movement, and all the fulness of childhood's gladness in those soft eyes, of the darkest violet, to which the fringed eyelashes gave a still deeper hue.

But there was a third person composing the group.

Leaning on the back of the student's chair, stood another young girl, apparently about the same age, in whose appearance there existed a peculiarity calculated to excite the beholder's attention. She too was dark, and the hair drawn plainly off an oval face showed the clear olive complexion—the peculiar black eye—the thin lips, bringing forcibly to the fancy some pictures of the Italian Masters—and if the appearance of her companions conveyed to the mind the idea that something warmer than English blood mingled in their veins, there could scarcely exist a doubt, that she was a child of the sunny South. It was difficult at first to discover what it was that gave far from a pleasing impression, whilst gazing upon that young face. Yes, even as she thus stood, watching with a smile upon her lips, the frolics of the little one, the mild blandness of that smile strangely contrasting with the immovable, almost sullen expression of the elder girl—yet there was some-

thing in the glance of the eye which contradicted the expression of the lips.

It was but a brief moment, although we have tarried in the description, that Mrs. Gordon contemplated the group, for the ball, with which the little girl was playing, having, in one of her random throws, missed its aim, and fallen on the very book of the reader, and after it having bounded the greyhound, overturning the volume, causing the grave girl to awaken from her abstraction, and to raise her eyes with a somewhat impatient expression, the sharp bark of the little animal, and the ringing laugh of its accomplice, was now echoed by another from Mr. Hamilton, as he stepped forward from behind the screen with his companion. The child sprang to her feet, and was about to run towards her guardian, but on seeing her stranger aunt was seized with a sudden fit of shyness. She pressed closer to her sister, who had also risen on beholding them, and they stood thus, hand in

hand, the former with her eyes still swimming with laughter, but bent on the ground, the latter looking towards them, with an air of cold embarrassment, as if uncertain whether or not to advance and meet them.

"Giulia! Francesca! my dear children, come and welcome your aunt," cried Mr. Hamilton.

"This I suppose is Giulia," said the sweet soft voice of Mrs. Gordon, as she took the hand the eldest coldly extended towards her, and affectionately kissed her cheek, though her heart was somewhat chilled by the forbidding deportment of her niece, and she gladly turned to the younger, and folded the child in her arms. She felt the embrace returned by the warm pressure of the little arms which encircled her neck. Tears of awakened affection rose to Mrs. Gordon's eyes, and she murmured in a voice of emotion, "My little darling!"

"What, Francesca?" said Mr. Hamilton, in

a playful tone, pleased with the impression made by his little favourite—and the long embrace terminated, the child turned towards him, and sprang upon his knee. “ Does your aunt think that she will be able to love such a little, ugly, naughty girl as you—who ever calls you a darling ? ”

“ You do, uncle,” for so the children ever styled their guardian, “ and I like her to name me thus, for she looks so kind, and smiles so sweetly, and presses me in her arms just like—” and her voice faltered; “ but,” she continued in a half whisper, “ there is something I had much rather she should call me.”

“ What ? ” asked Mr. Hamilton.

“ Ah ! Giulia will tell you,” continued Francesca, the colour mounting to her temples, and hiding her face on her guardian’s shoulder.

But Giulia, who, whilst her sister was thus the centre of attraction, had stood with no smile, nor any sign of interest on her countenance,

upon being thus addressed by her, answered not, but turned away, with a slight quiver on her lip and a shade of increased colour on her face. But all were too much occupied with the interesting child to remark her.

“Tell me, dearest Francesca,” continued Mrs. Gordon, “what you like best to be called,” and she drew the little beauty towards her, and bent down to kiss her; whilst she did so, the little girl whispered, her voice trembling with emotion, and her violet eyes glistening as with dew drops—

“Mama used to call me ‘*Cara Francesca mia*,’ or ‘*Carissima Francesca*,’ and I should like one so kind looking as you, dear lady, thus to name me also.”

When Mrs. Gordon next looked round the room, her eyes fell upon the third girl, who had retired to a remote part of the room, and stood watching the scene with an air of unobtrusive humility. Mrs. Gordon held out her hand, saying,

“ I see I have yet another acquaintance to make.”

“ Oh, yes, come here !” said Mr. Hamilton, “ this is a little girl who, I believe I told you, has been a companion to your nieces for many years, and who I hope you will find worthy of your kindness and esteem.”

The lady took the girl’s hand, and spoke some kind words, which were received with an air of becoming deference—her eyes bent humbly to the ground—and having pronounced in the liquid tones of her language, “ You are very condescending, Signora,” she retreated to her former position.

Mr. Hamilton then proposed that the traveller should repair to her apartment, to prepare for dinner.

“ And here comes a gentleman,” he added, walking to the window, “ who will, I doubt not, be of opinion, that dinner will be the most expedient act just now,” and at that mo-

ment a young man, with a gun on his shoulder, was seen approaching, across the spacious lawn on which the window looked.

Mr. Hamilton threw open the wide casement; the little greyhound sprang over the sill and bounded to meet him, followed less lightly by the Newfoundland.

“ There they go !” cried Mr. Hamilton, laughing, “ Now, Francesca, my girl, after them,” he continued clapping his hands, as the little girl, her eyes sparkling gladly, had at first made a step forward, as if she also meditated a flight, and then stopped suddenly, awed by her aunt’s presence, blushing and smiling, and stealing a lingering glance after her less scrupulous friends. At her guardian’s voice of encouragement, and a kind smile from her aunt, she waited no longer, but bounded on the edge of the window with the lightness of a Finella, and was seen flying across the lawn into the arms of the young man, who covered her with kisses, the two dogs jump-

ing around them, as if seeking a share in those caresses. Mr. Hamilton seemed heartily to enjoy the scene, and said, turning to Mrs. Gordon,

“A lovely little creature, is she not? such life and spirits, with such a warm, affectionate heart; I like to see a young creature like that,” and he involuntarily turned his eyes back on the Baroness, who stood a little in the back ground, opposite the window, with her eyes fixed upon the scene, with a look of greater interest and animation enlivening her countenance, though, as if the feeling partook more of pain than pleasure—for her cheek was slightly flushed, and a darker shade was on her brow. But she again dropped her eyes when she saw those of her aunt and guardian fixed upon her.

Mr. Hamilton continued, “Now I would very much like to see a little more life and gaiety in our young peeress here,” and he held out his hand to the Baroness, and drew her

kindly towards him, “and I have no doubt that with so kind and agreeable a companion, as she will now have, one who will not let her mope all day over musty books and nonsense, that she will soon be as lively as Francesca herself; and perhaps the next time I come, I shall see her even take a leap out of this window.”

“And give Mr. Claud Hamilton the same warm reception as Francesca?” said Mrs. Gordon, smiling, in order to relieve her niece, who was evidently far from enjoying thus being commented upon. She saw her lip tremble—and the tears gather in her eyes. “That would be asking rather too much from Lady de Crespigny’s dignified age,” her aunt continued laughing, “would it not, Giulia?”

“Yes,” the young girl replied, with her eyes, fixed upon the group; and there was a bitterness in her tone which startled Mrs. Gordon, who had scarcely heard her speak; “it would be as unnatural as Hector endeavouring

to share with Arno, some of those caresses, and would, doubtless, be received in the same manner," she added, in a voice scarcely audible, as she perceived the affectionate demonstrations of the Newfoundland, which were becoming rather too obstreperous, repulsed by Claud, whilst the greyhound, which had been placed in his arms by Francesca, was fondled and suffered to lick his face. The little girl in the meanwhile was kneeling on the ground, busily occupied in examining the contents of the game bag.

"Well," said Mr. Hamilton, dropping the hand of the young Baroness, and turning away, "I only hope that Francesca will not let herself be made an old woman before her time; that's all I have to say. Ah! here comes the little beauty — and is Claud not a fine fellow, Mrs. Gordon?"

Mr. Hamilton's encomiums, though they might seem rather partial, were not exaggerated; the young man who now approached,

was as fine a specimen of an English youth, as might be seen.

He was not more than nineteen ; his tall, straight figure showed off to advantage the becoming dress of a sportaman ; his brown hair, pushed back from a clear open brow, displayed a handsome face, glowing with youthful spirits, and bright from the effects of the healthful sport in which he had been engaged. His clear, blue eyes turned with a laughing good-nature on his little companion, whose style of dark beauty, formed so striking a contrast to the truly Saxon cast of his complexion and general appearance. The child bounded by his side graceful as a fawn—the very personification of gaiety — with a gaudy pheasant's feather stuck amidst her glossy hair.

On reaching the window, young Hamilton was presented to Mrs. Gordon, who was as much attracted by his frank, unaffected manner, as with his personal beauty ; and after

a little conversation, he looked in at the window with a smile, and in a kind tone of voice, said,

" Well, Giulia, I have had capital sport, and have brought home the first brace of wood-cocks shot this season, for your especial eating."

Mrs. Gordon looked at her niece, in order that she might have the gratification of seeing her under that influence—seldom without its power, even over the dullest and coldest of temperaments—the brightening ray of kindness and consideration, rendered, in the present instance, doubly valuable to a young girl's heart, coming from one so young and attractive; nor was she disappointed—nay, the result was beyond her expectation, so great was the momentary alteration effected by the smile, which lighted up the "unsparkling eyes" of the young girl. She even commenced a few words in a tone of something like cheerful graciousness, but stopped abruptly, and

the sunshine passed away from her countenance as Claud turned round the next moment to answer to the demands on his attention, from her *exigeante* little sister.

Lady de Crespigny then left the window, followed by the Italian girl, who had been standing a little apart, watching all that was going on, her dark eyes gleaming through the gathering shades of approaching night.

That evening was spent in the library. There they sat, the wax-lights and blazing fire imparting their all-cheering influence to the aspect of the sombre-looking apartment, and seeming to impart almost the semblance of a smile, to a grim-visaged Baron de Crespigny, who, in complete armour, hung in his dark oaken frame above the mantel-piece.

As for the party themselves, it was still the little Francesca, who, whilst she remained amongst them, was the life and spirit of all around, and the chief object of notice. Mrs. Gordon, fatigued by her journey, reposed in

one of the ancient carved oak chairs, placed on either side of the fire-place.

The two elder girls sat working by the table; the Baroness scarcely taking her eyes from her employment — the Italian girl, apparently as much absorbed in her occupation, though, occasionally, Mrs. Gordon observed her dark eyes casting a stealthy glance upon the movements of the others, and occasionally she spoke in a low tone to the Baroness.

Claud, however, was not so ungallant as to allow his whole attention to be absorbed by one lady of the party, and often he approached Giulia, with some casual remark or question, concerning the work in which he seemed much interested; and Mrs. Gordon was surprised to hear the well-expressed, and fluent language of the Italian girl, forming so strong a contrast to the abrupt, embarrassed manner of the Baroness, whenever she did attempt to exceed the mono-

syllabic limit, to which she generally restrained herself.

Nice always spoke in her own beautiful tongue, and she was ever addressed in Italian by the two young De Crespignys, and also by Claud Hamilton ; but, although the latter spoke the language better than most Englishmen, in his pronunciation might be plainly detected a difference from the pure and perfect accent of the girls.

"How I shall surprise my lazy sisters!" Claud exclaimed, as he seated himself by Giulia's side, "when I return home laden with my treasures—how can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

Giulia answered not, but her fingers seemed to lose their dexterity, and her silk to become entangled, while Nice merely raised her glittering eyes an instant to his face.

"And you, you little idle thing," Claud exclaimed, looking at Francesca, who was

kneeling on a chair leaning her elbows on the table, watching her sister and the Italian girl —her sweet eyes now filled with a quiet seriousness, more charming still than in her merry mood, “you do nothing for me, but tease me.”

She looked at him first with a half-ashamed, anxious expression, as if she thought his words were spoken in earnest, but the next instant catching his smile, she exclaimed, as she sprang up and cast her arms around his neck—

“ Oh, yes! I love you, and that I know you like much better; and when you come back, I am to be your little wife; and then I shall be older, and able not only to love you, but work for you too.”

“ Francesca, you have entangled all my silk,” murmured her sister in a fretful tone, whilst Claud, laughing and colouring, said, as he submitted to the embrace,

“ What a darling little wife I shall have!”

"The dear, loving little creature!" exclaimed Mr. Hamilton from his arm chair, in which, after his favorite had been summoned to bed, he dropped into a gentle nap; and the conversation was then principally sustained by Mrs. Gordon and Claud, until they retired for the night.

CHAPTER III.

" For seldom smiled
The serious child,
And as she passed from childhood green,
More far between those smiles—and few
More sad and wild.

* * * * *

And all her pleasure was to roam,
* + * and wheresoe'er
She saddest felt—to sojourn there.'

PHILIP VON ATEVELDE.

IT was with a feeling of melancholy, that Mrs. Gordon found herself that night in the solitude of her tapestried chamber.

After an interval of many years, she was under the roof of her forefathers, the solitary

survivor of all the contemporaries of her family, and in the place of her stately father, and noble brothers, a new generation had sprung up to fill the walls of the ancient mansion. Two young, helpless girls were the sole remnants of her name.

Her father, and two young brothers had died some time before her marriage, and after that event, some eighteen years ago, Mrs. Gordon had parted from her only remaining relative, the late lord, to accompany her husband into Scotland, and they were never destined to meet again. Shortly after that period, Lord De Crespigny accepted an embassy to Italy, and there wedded a beautiful daughter of the land.

After that union, he fixed his abode in one of the fairest palaces of the City of Florence, and becoming more and more enamoured with the delights of that bewitching country, he lingered from year to year, devoting himself, even when war and contention were raging

round, to the peaceful pursuit of art and science, and to the society of his dark-eyed Francesca.

It was not until the renewal, in 1803, of a threatening aspect of affairs, and the violent animosities excited in the breast of Napoleon against the English, that he judged it prudent to return to his long deserted country, in order to escape the storm which seemed ready to burst forth.

Three children had been born to him. The two girls already introduced to our readers, and a son, who had proved too frail an exotic, to bear removal to the cold climate of his father's country. The boy drooped and died, a year after their arrival. The health of the Italian mother, though more gradually, seemed also to suffer. The change from her own summer skies was too sudden—too ungenial—and gradually she faded, and the loss of the beloved child—idolized with such passionate

tenderness, gave a shock to her constitution, never to be recovered.

Immediately after the death of the boy, they had quitted their seat in Berkshire, the scene of their bereavement, and with their remaining children buried themselves in the solitude and gloom of Shirley Hall; from that time—the first violent pang of grief subsiding, they seemed to sink into a sort of luxurious stupor, a perfect detachment from aught, save the enjoyment of each other's society.

Four years thus glided away, and then death came to separate them—the husband was the first it claimed. Lady De Crespigny lingered seven or eight months, and followed him to the grave, not many weeks before this story commenced.

There was one circumstance which remained a mystery to those around them. No one knew what was the faith in which they

died. The Baroness at the time of her marriage was a Catholic. The usual arrangements had been made, that the sons should be brought up in the religion of the father, the daughters in that of the mother.

Till the departure of Lady de Crespigny from Italy her confessor had always resided in the house. A shrewd, zealous, and designing priest was this Abbé Cellini, commonly called Fra Paolo. His eyes had been ever fixed with eager watchfulness and anxiety on the husband.

With Lord de Crespigny's foreign tastes and sentiments, it seemed more than possible that he would have been an easy convert to the Popish religion; however, years rolled away, and no vacillation of opinion gave reason to justify any hopes or fears on the subject—and the moment arrived when the Abbé had the mortification of seeing him depart from the circle of his influence, unconverted—

and it was also with indignant misgivings, that his church was in danger of losing a member, in her who was about to be exposed, unsupported, to the dangers of heretic England, with no spiritual adviser to watch over the safety of her soul; for the Abbé received no invitation to make one of the suite of the Baron de Crespigny.

With a solemn warning, therefore, to guard against the snares which would encompass her, and praying that she might maintain a strict guard over the faith of herself and her children, Cellini saw Lady de Crespigny depart, and it was with a view to the preservation of some communication between himself and this straying sheep of his fold, that he embraced with eagerness the Baroneess's offer, of taking with her to England his little orphan niece, who had, from her earliest infancy, dwelt with him, beneath the roof of the de Crespigny's. It was arranged that she should remain with them until she reached

the age at which she was destined to enter a convent. Cellini at the same time extracted a solemn promise, that nothing should be neglected, necessary to the strict preservation of the doctrines of her religion.

In this Lady de Crespigny never failed. The little Nise was instructed by herself in the first principles of her religion, and was sent constantly to a town, seven or eight miles distant, both to attend the Roman Catholic chapel, and also to receive spiritual instruction from the officiating priest. But no priest ever entered the hall.

In a county, where so many Roman Catholic families of the highest distinction abounded, it is not likely that the clergy of that persuasion would passively submit to their exclusion from a house, where they considered they had a legitimate right to be admitted, in order to look after the interest of the Mother Church; but they sought in vain for admittance—nor did any of the establishment of Shirley Hall

save the Italian girl, ever repair to the Town of — to attend mass. This certainly was an ominous sign.

And the Baron—he appeared equally remiss in the outward forms of his religion. Divine Service was performed on Sundays, for the benefit of the Protestant establishment, in the chapel adjoining the house, but Lord de Crespigny was never present, the state of his health being received as an excuse by the domestics.

After a while, however, the young Giulia was ordered by her parents, to attend the service in the Protestant chapel. Whether this was to cover his own omission, or with a view to his daughter's adoption of her father's faith, was for a time doubtful. The rector of the village, three miles from Shirley, one of the lukewarm divines of that period, did not give himself much trouble, beyond his immediate duties, about the spiritual concerns of his nominal patron, who never asked him to dinner,

or courted his society, except occasionally on matters of business ; and as to the young Giulia, who sat with so serious a countenance amongst her attendants, in the crimson-cushioned pew, the rector contented himself with shaking hands with her every Sunday, after the service was over, telling her she was a most attentive young lady, and enquiring after the health of her parents.

The governess too, who, for a few years, lived with the de Crespignys, was a Protestant, and received no directions to impart to her charges any other religious instruction than her own creed. From these facts it was obvious, that whatever might be the opinions of the parents, they had no bias towards the Roman Catholic faith, as far as their children were concerned.

The former point remained doubtful to the last, both husband and wife dying peacefully and happily, declaring their faith in the same God, and the same Saviour, but with no de-

claration which could throw light upon their peculiar opinions ; excepting a clause in Lord de Crespigny's will, setting forth his desire that his daughters might be suffered to follow the religion most accordant to their inclinations.

Might it not therefore be inferred, that two hearts so closely united, might have become amalgamated into one spirit ; regardless of every outward form, but that the essence of both religions had melted into one, and they had finally lost sight of all, save love for one another, and adoration towards that God whose name is love.

In this atmosphere of tenderness, how had thriven the two young beings whose history we are about to narrate ?

One, at least, bore no impress of having been reared in the hot bed of affection, but rather in some cold, barren region, " where flowers that love the light cannot flourish," and Mrs. Gordon marvelled whether the re-

pulsive manner of her eldest niece was to be attributed to the sterile nature of her disposition, or that, as in the case of Gideon's fleece, "the dew had fallen on all around" save her.

The morning, however, enlightened her on many subjects. On leaving her bed-room, Mrs. Gordon was attracted by the sound of a merry voice, singing, laughing, and talking, in a neighbouring apartment. On entering it, she found the little Francesca seated on a low stool at her nurse's feet, and thus beguiling the time, whilst she submitted to the tedious occupation of having her dark locks arranged in proper form.

Mrs. Gordon having stooped to give and receive an affectionate kiss, stood watching the completion of the performance, evidently awaited with much impatience, both by the young lady and the little Arno, who sat by her side, watching the completion of his mistress's toilette, for Claud's voice was heard talking to his dogs on the lawn. The little

girl was at length released, and having received, whilst snatching a hasty kiss from her nurse, the parting admonition—

“ Now, my dear Miss Francie, do not go and shake all your hair to pieces,” she was soon seen by them from the window flying across the lawn, the wind laughing to scorn all poor nurse’s labours.

“ Dear darling!” said the faithful servant, after Mrs. Gordon had made some comments on her beauty and playfulness, “ what a mercy it is that the young are such light-hearted creatures, for, God knows, there has been enough in this house of late to sadden any one.”

“ Did the poor children feel their mother’s death very much?” enquired Mrs. Gordon. “ The Baroness especially, at her age must have been companionable to her parents—she, I fear, suffered most acutely—to that cause, I suppose, may be attributed her very grave deportment.”

Nurse shook her head somewhat hesitatingly.

"As for that, Madam," she said, "the Baroness has ever been so unlike other children—so quiet and reserved, that it is hard to make out what she feels, and what she does not. Now that other little darling—I shall never forget her sorrow at first; but no wonder, for they say that 'love begets love,' and I must own, I think that dear Miss Giulia's feelings for her parents never had fair play, whilst Francesca, oh! how both my lord and lady doted on that child—she was almost always with them—and after her poor father's death the late Baroness never liked her to be out of her sight—in her room she remained from morning till night, and the little creature, though so full of life and spirits, never wished to leave her; and oh! Madam," and the good woman lifted her handkerchief to her eyes and wept, "I shall never forget the day she died."

"I never heard the particulars of that event," said Mrs. Gordon much interested.

"The poor lady," resumed the nurse, "went off quite suddenly at the last in her sleep, and there I found her lying, looking so beautiful in her snow white dress, just like marble, and the little darling by her side, with her long, black hair falling over her mother—her arms twined around her; we removed the dear child—she was asleep—but when we told her what had happened, I thought she would have broke her heart, although she said, poor dear! that she knew it was naughty in her to cry, as her Mama was far happier now that she was gone to papa, and that she had been talking to her about it, just before she went to sleep."

"And her sister?" enquired Mrs. Gordon.

"The morning before her ladyship's death, she had spent some time alone with her, in earnest conversation, and, poor young creature, when she heard her mother was gone, she

turned away, and only seemed to wish to be alone; for some time after, it was sad to see how she seemed to shun the sight of her little sister, who, dear child, as it was natural, would follow her for comfort; but whenever she came near her, the young Baroness would shrink away and hide herself, seeming to hate the sight of the little darling—And yet she can love—for how she used to dote upon her little brother, and how bitterly did she grieve at his death! but, as I said before, ‘love begets love,’ and that dear boy was always very fond of Miss Giulia.”

“But was not the Baroness then a favorite with her parents?” enquired Mrs. Gordon, her interest increasing with every word spoken by the narrator.

“I will tell you all about it, Madam, for you ought to know everything relating to these dear children. Perhaps you may have heard, that I was sent for immediately on their arrival in England, as your brother, Lord de

Crespigny, had always promised that I should attend upon his children, for the sake of my mother, who had been his own nurse. I soon perceived that there was a difference in their manner towards Miss Giulia— it was not like the tender affection which they bestowed on the other two children, and I heard from the servants, who accompanied them from Italy, that it had ever been so. It was a disappointment to my lord and lady, at first, that she had not been a boy, particularly as years passed away before another child was born; and more so, that she was not as fair as might have been expected from their being so beautiful themselves, and they were fond of having everything beautiful about them, so when that lovely boy was born she was thought very little about at all. When I saw how matters stood with regard to her, and how little she was noticed, I used sometimes to make bold to speak a word for the poor child, for I could see at first, that she felt their neglect ; but my

lady would answer, that it could scarcely be expected that they should evince the same tender affection towards a child who did not in the least appreciate their love. They loved her, she would add, equally as the little ones, but Giulia was so strange a child, and shewed so few signs of feeling. The hearts of the parents," the nurse continued, " seemed to warm somewhat towards their elder daughter, when they saw how fond the little boy was of her, and how she loved and nursed him, in his long illness. Perhaps it was from the circumstance of his being a boy, but Giulia never seemed in the least to grudge the excessive tenderness shewn to him by her parents, though much did her heart rebel against the partiality manifested towards her sister; and then, when they all came here, after the death of the dear boy, and my lord and lady shut themselves up in this dismal mansion, matters became worse and worse again, for then Miss Giulia seemed as if she always fancied herself

an intruder, when she crept in amongst them, her father and mother so loving together, and wrapped up in the little Francesca, who seemed to have become all that both she and her brother had been before. And yet not a harsh word, or unkind act, demonstrated their lack of love; but any one could plainly see that they never cared much that she should be with them, or missed her when she was away, and she would creep back into that great gloomy library, and sit moping over dusty books for hours together, all alone; I used very often to find her there, sitting huddled up in a corner, all in the dark, when I had left the others comfortably together in my lady's room. I have heard them wonder that Miss Giulia preferred so much being alone —they grieved over the little pleasure she seemed to feel in being with them, and they would sigh over what they termed the eccentricity of her disposition."

"And where was the Italian girl all this time?" enquired Mrs. Gordon.

"Oh! the Signorina Nice!" said the nurse, with a change in her tone of voice, "she also used to spend much of the day with my lord and lady—she understood how to make herself useful to them—and they liked to see her study to amuse Miss Francesca, and do all those little acts of attention, which I am sure our young Baroness would have rejoiced, (had she been encouraged) to perform, and indeed, which it was her natural right to do, but, somehow, that little foreign girl had always a knack of getting round people, even from a child, though she does seem so mild and humble like."

"Why, nurse," said Mrs. Gordon, "Nice does not appear to be a great favourite of yours;" and the lady smiled as she thought how invariably servants seem to entertain antipathies to interlopers entering a family, in any situation approaching to subordination.

"Oh, Madam, it would be very wrong of me to take a dislike to any one so young, or

to prejudice you against her and I will leave you to judge for yourself of the young girl ; perhaps there is one circumstance which makes me doubt whether all is as fair as it appears to be."

" And what is the charge you have to make against the beautiful Italian girl ?" enquired Mrs. Gordon.

" Why, Madam, Miss Francesca, who seems as if she could not choose but love everything that is good, does not, I think, take to the Signorina."

" But the Baroness and Nice seem attached to each other," said Mrs. Gordon.

" Why yes, Madam, lately---that is, since my lord's death, the Signorina seems to have got quite round the Baroness—and they are very much together—not that I think it is of much good to my young lady—what I should like, would be to see her more sisterly in her ways towards that other little darling ; and Francesca, I am sure, is anxious to love her sister dearly, if only she would let her."

Here ended the nurse's communication, for Mrs. Gordon was called to breakfast. She departed however with a lightened heart, for she fancied she could now see her way more clearly through the dark prospect, which, at first sight, the forbidding manner of her eldest niece had presented to her imagination.

Mrs. Gordon knew well, how many evil passions may trace their source from wounded feelings—from some smarting sense of neglect or unkindness—some consciousness of insignificance, or deficiency in the power of pleasing ! The corroding, crushing thoughts, which mortification has engendered, might never have sprung up in the heart, had it been cheered and cherished by love and indulgence. Mrs. Gordon, as she walked slowly towards the breakfast room, ruminated deeply on the subject, and the result of her meditations was the firm resolve, with the blessing of God upon her endeavours, to try whether the warmth of affection and kindness, could not draw forth the gleams of light, which might still emanate

from her niece's heart—to study to inspire the young girl with that self respect, without which few pass through this world prosperously or happily.

Alas ! it is a fearful undertaking to tamper in any way with the self-love which is inherent in every human heart ! It is a cruel act to trifle with the feelings of a child—to destroy the germs of natural sensibility by coldness, or unkindness. There is a poison in the wound thus inflicted, which never ceases to work its fatal influence over the future conduct of the unfortunate, who has been the victim of such mismanagement.

CHAPTER IV.

“ As jars the hinge, what sullen echoes call !
Oh haste ! unfold the hospitable hall !

* * * * *

The storied arras, source of fond delight,
With old achievement charms the wilder'd sight,
And still with Heraldry's rich hues impress,
On the dim window glows the pictured crest.”

ROGERS.

Mrs. GORDON, assisted by Mr. Hamilton, was occupied for the most part of that day, in settling all the details connected with the establishment, which she was about to take under her superintendence, and then, escorted by the

young people, she was taken the round of the old mansion, through its enormous chambers, vast as Horace Walpole describes those which the nobility of ancient times delighted in, but did not know how to furnish.

Through the picture gallery—the armoury—the chapel—all those obscure passages—and even the very nooks and dusky apartments which such ancient houses generally contain, was Mrs. Gordon paraded, the Baroness and Nice walking demurely by her side, while the merry voices of Claud and Francesca echoed around the silent place.

The library was the only one of the larger apartments which was to be open for the constant use of the family, as both for comfort, and on account of the limited establishment that was allowed to the Baroness during her minority, it was expedient that the most compact part of the mansion should be inhabited.

The apartments, therefore, for their immediate occupation, consisted of the bed-room

and private sitting-room of Mrs. Gordon—those of the girls, a small dining-room, and the large apartment denominated by courtesy the school-room, but which had become more properly the play-room of Francesca, since the governess, who having, for a few years, superintended the education of the Baroness departed, finding the place too dull for endurance.

These rooms were all situated in one of the long passages, which opened on either side of the picture gallery, very similar to those at Hardwicke; from which it is supposed, every night at the witching hour of twelve, Queen Elizabeth issues out at one door, and Mary Queen of Scots at the other, to curtsey profoundly to each other, and sit conversing amicably till day break.

The other passage also contained apartments, but when Mrs. Gordon, having entered it, attempted to turn the handle of one of the doors, she found it locked, and seeing the girls look grave and hang back, she retreated,

guessing with truth, that it might have been one of the apartments of the late Lord and Lady De Crespigny.

Mr. Hamilton could not be spared much longer from his official duties in London, nor Claud by his family, as he was so shortly to set off on his foreign mission. During the period of their stay at Shirley Hall, they were, as Mr. Hamilton had promised, gladdened by the enlivening presence of the young man; his society seemed to shed sunshine over all -- even the joyless Giulia was not proof against its influence--and as the time drew near for their departure, Mrs. Gordon felt indeed, that it would make a sad difference in their daily routine of existence, and had she not made up her mind to a life of the greatest seclusion, entirely devoted to the two young beings who were consigned to her charge, trusting to extract pleasure and satisfaction solely from her own inward resources, and the affection she hoped

to inspire in the hearts of her young nieces, she might have looked forward with no small degree of dread to the future; for, of any enjoyment independent of these resources, there certainly was no bright prospect. For some years, her abode was to be entirely confined to a gloomy mansion, surrounded by country of no beauty or interest and many miles distant from anything like society. Indeed, the secluded life led by the late Lord and Lady De Crespigny had rendered the family perfect strangers to all the neighbourhood—no visiter having, from the time of their arrival till that of their death, ever entered the walls of Shirley Hall, with the exception of Colonel Hamilton and his son.

Young Claud had, (Mrs. Gordon learnt,) often accompanied his father on his visits to Lord De Crespigny, and remained for weeks together at the hall. He contrived to win all hearts by his attractive manner, his atten-

tive kindness to young and old; astounding the ancient walls with sounds of merriment, in the place of the gliding steps, hushed voices, and solemn faces generally heard and seen within the gloomy precincts.

The evening before the departure of Mr. Hamilton and his son, Mrs. Gordon made some enquiries concerning Colonel Vavasour, who, although he was already making himself known in the world, as one of the heroes of the Peninsular War, was a complete stranger to her—nor was she even aware of the circumstances attending the commencement of her brother's intimacy with him.

Mrs. Gordon now learnt that Colonel Vavasour had been wounded in the Italian Campaign of 18—, and was received into the Palazzo of Lord De Crespigny, who treated him with great kindness. In the ardent breast of the Baron, an attachment and admiration was excited towards the young soldier, which, although they never met again, was

preserved with unabated ardour, and, at Lord De Crespigny's death, it was found that he had named the gallant youth, as the joint guardian with his older friend Mr. Hamilton, to his orphan girls.

"And a sinecure office it seems, I think, likely to prove," Mr Hamilton added, "for I do not suppose it is probable that my friend Vavasour will be able leave his warlike duties to assist in the task of managing these two troublesome young ladies; however, we must send for him, Mrs. Gordon," he added, as he drew Francesca towards him, "if we have any difficulty in keeping them in order; so beware little lady, for a fine fierce-looking fellow he is, I can assure you."

"Is he?" said Francesca, with a slight shudder, and she raised her eyes to the portrait above the fire-place, and gazed at it with a look of awe; "and does he wear armour, and hold a long lance, and look so stern, like that

warrior? Oh! pray don't send him here, uncle."

"Well! Claud may take a very tolerable account of you to Portugal; and we will give him leave to stay and fight the French a little longer."

"And is Claud going to fight too, and have scars and wounds, and come back as fierce and dreadful-looking as Colonel Vavasour?" continued Francesca, in a melancholy voice.

"Would to Heaven I were, Francesca!" the young man exclaimed.

"What! and perhaps be killed, and never return to your little wife?"

"No! I would rather not be killed," he continued, as he returned her gentle caress; "but what would I give to be able to distinguish myself like Vavasour, and win for myself a name at five-and-twenty, as he has done—instead of," he continued, with a slight tone of petulance, "being obliged to walk in the steps of a stupid, intriguing envoy—to look on, with a pen in my

hand as my only weapon, whilst my brave countrymen are fighting around me," and the young man darted a look of reproach upon his father, who, however, feigned to be too much occupied with his paper to observe him; and, at the same time, to avoid entering upon a discussion of the only subject on which he had ever differed from his son.

The fact was Mr. Hamilton had been tempted by the more lucrative prospect it held out--and which his large family rendered of no inconsiderable moment--to chose for Claud a foreign, civil appointment, which might lead hereafter to something better, in preference to his entering the army; which the young man would infinitely have preferred. Claud had turned to Mrs. Gordon for sympathy.

"Is it not too bad?" he said. "In these times, should not every disengaged man be a soldier?"

But Mrs. Gordon, not willing to encourage rebellion against parental authority, merely

made some remarks on the power all possess, of rendering every profession and situation in life, conducive to the good of mankind.

“ Well !” said the youth, good-humoredly breaking off, after a little amicable argument. “ Well ! I suppose I must content myself with my fate; and when all the brave fellows return crowned with laurels—but minus legs and arms, I shall have all my limbs safe and sound, and gain that advantage, at least, in the ladies’ eyes.”

“ Oh yes, dear Claud, and you shall have a crown also. I will pull down all my laurels to make you one—it shall be much finer than Colonel Vavasour’s, for I daresay he has no little wife to make one for him.—I am so glad you will not come back fierce and ugly-looking like him.”.

“ A fine impression we have given you, Francesca, of the handsomest man in the British

army—who is, they say, turning the heads of all the Spanish ladies."

"Well!" said Claud, "remember, Francesca, you are not to allow any one to cut out your old playmate—my little wife, I am sure, will be constant; but Giulia," he continued, turning to the Baroness, who sat with a countenance of more than usual gloom, "Giulia will be grown into a fine lady, and I shall find her figuring away at Court, in her plumes and diamonds."

Francesca laughed aloud in the innocence of her heart at this idea—certainly it was a difficult undertaking to personify to the imagination, the dull, plain-looking girl under such circumstances. Giulia probably felt this herself, and understood the laugh, for the colour mounted to her temples, and she darted an angry look at the offender.

"And she will never deign to cast her eyes upon poor Claud, who, many and many a time, has hazarded his life for her, in climbing up to

hunt for books in those old dusty shelves, which had never left their hiding places since the year one. No, the Baroness De Crespiigny will be surrounded by peers and nobles, all dazzled by her wit and beauty, and—”

Here Francesca again burst out into a merry laugh. Not so much was it elicited by the idea of poor neglected Giulia ever becoming courted, or beautiful, as at the mock pathos and gravity with which Claud delivered this speech. The young man, however, soon perceived, by Giulia's clouded countenance, and quivering lips, as she murmured some unintelligible words, that he had offended her; so he turned to Nice, saying,

“And she, my little instructress, who has so patiently endured my murderous attempts in pronouncing your beautiful language—flattering my self-love, by declaring that I read Tasso like a native, she I suppose—”

"She?" interrupted the young girl, in a low, soft tone, turning her glittering eyes towards him, "she, perhaps, may never see you more — may perhaps be for ever where she may never again behold the dear friends, who have been so kind to her--forgotten by those she never can forget!"

"My dear Nice, how pathetic!" said Claud, lifting his handkerchief to his eyes in mock emotion, "that speech is indeed worthy of Metastasio—No—no, Nice, you do not mean, I hope, to let them hide you from the world before I return; those eyes, if I predict rightly, are likely to do a great deal of mischief, before they are sent to glitter through a grating. Oh no, Nice, a convent life will never suit your talents."

There was an intonation in his tone, which might have appeared to render these words rather an equivocal compliment, but the Italian girl received this speech with a smile and a gentle sigh.

"Oh I should not like to be shut up in a convent, and have my hair cut off, and wear a great black veil," said Francesca, "nor you, Nice, I am sure, but I know who would. Oh, it is just suited for Giulia; she might then be by herself all the day long, and do nothing but read."

Every one laughed, and no one save Giulia heard some low spoken words uttered by Nice as she bent over her work. They were,

"Yes, no doubt, you would consider that an advantageous arrangement, Signorina Francesca," but the speech was uttered solely for the Baroness's ears, who suddenly lifting up her eyes, from which darted a flash of anger, exclaimed,

"I am quite willing to go anywhere—to hide from you all, my ugliness and stupidity—"

Tears then choked her voice, and she turned away abruptly and left the room.

Francesca, who perceived, though she hardly knew how that she had offended, began also

to weep. Claud was concerned, and Mrs. Gordon was grieved to witness in her niece such a display of temper.

Nice glided from the room after her fugitive friend.

CHAPTER V.

"Oh, cast thou not
Affection from thee ! In this bitter world
Hold to thine heart that only treasure fast.
Watch—guard it—suffer not a breath to dim
The bright gem's purity."

MRS. HEMANS.

THERE were no adieux spoken that night, as it had been agreed, that though the gentlemen were to depart at a very early hour the following morning, all the party should meet at breakfast, but when Mrs. Gordon descended

to the dining-room she only found it occupied by Mr. Hamilton. Claud, he said, was having a scene with the poor children, who were much distressed at the idea of losing him.

Nice and Francesca soon after appeared, the latter with eyes every moment overflowing with tears, even in the midst of the smiles which Mr. Hamilton's playful railleries excited. Claud, Nice informed them, was still with Lady de Crespigny, and it was not till she had been sent to summon him, the carriage having been announced, that he appeared.

"Giulia and I have been having a little private conversation," he said in a low voice to Mrs. Gordon, as he snatched a hasty breakfast, "and I hope you will find, that I have done a little good."

These words related to a conversation which Mrs. Gordon had held with Mr. Hamilton, on the peculiar character of Giulia, in which

Claud had taken a part, showing an interest in the two girls, which had greatly raised his kindness of heart in Mrs. Gordon's consideration. Giulia did not make her appearance to bid farewell to her guardian, and he, after calling her loudly by her name, having already been kept waiting longer than suited his somewhat hasty temper, grew impatient, and leaving her a message, entered the carriage.

Claud, as soon as he could tear himself away from the weeping Francesca, consigned her to the arms of Mrs. Gordon, and saying, with the tears glistening in his eyes, "Take care of my little wife, Mrs. Gordon, till I return," followed his father, and the carriage rolled away. The young man often remembered in later days, the melancholy feeling he had experienced as he looked back, and saw the weeping child standing in the ancient, grass-grown courtway, and how strangely the idea had passed through his mind of wonder

as to the future. When, and under what circumstances, should he again look on the gloomy mansion appearing more sombre than ever on that dark November morning, but to which he now felt he had attached himself, with a degree of interest most strange under existing circumstances, and of which he had been unaware, till the moment when he knew that it might be many a long day before he should again behold it, and the youthful members of the melancholy abode?

He felt inclined to laugh at himself for the extreme depression, excited in his heart, in parting with three almost children—possessing, as one might have supposed, but little to attach them so forcibly to a young man like himself. He wondered also how it would be, when he again beheld them, and whether his present feelings might not be ominous of—at some future period—his destiny being interwoven with theirs. But any such thoughts were soon

afterwards dispersed from his volatile mind, by weightier and more substantial considerations.

The following month he was to embark for Portugal ; the affairs of that country, at that period, then agitating the British Cabinet, which his father was now hastening to join. We will leave them for the present, and return to those who, in partings, are ever most to be pitied.

Those who depart, whatever may be their grief at the moment of separation, have the advantage of fresh objects, and fresh interests, to lessen the weight of sorrow, and give new impetus to the mind—but those who are left behind, meet at every moment, in the most trifling incidents and objects, phantoms, as it were, filling up the vacant places of the departed, and awakening regrets for those they loved so well—the idea sometimes, perchance, that they did not sufficiently prize, whilst those

they had now lost were still near them. Absence now shews forth those perfections, which before were not enough appreciated. Even children can feel the blank thus created, and little Francesca experienced it with much acuteness, for though her tears were but like those of childhood,

“The dew drop on the rose,”

Her mind was often recalled, that first day of separation, by some trifling object or incident, to the memory of her loss. Once it was only by an old glove, brought to her by Arno, in the hope of its being made into an instrument for his amusement—but snatching it indignantly from his mouth, and bursting into tears, she cried,

“Dear Claud’s glove,” and placed it in her bosom, to be afterwards transferred to her receptacle for treasures, and prized almost as much, as the little locket with his hair, which hung around her neck — a parting gift!

When Mrs. Gordon found herself left in good earnest alone, to enter upon all the responsibilities of her situation, her first thought, after endeavouring to comfort Francesca, was to seek for Giulia. Accompanied by the former, she set out upon her search through the library, school-room, and every place where Francesca thought it likely her sister might be found, but without success—nor was Nice to be seen. At length, on passing from the corridor, containing the apartments the family occupied, Francesca paused in the gallery, and lowering her voice almost to a whisper, she said, with a serious expression of countenance as she pointed to the opposite door,

“Perhaps, aunt, Giulia may be there,” and with subdued footsteps she led her aunt along, and arriving at a door, gently turned the handle, pushed it open, and entered.

Mrs. Gordon stood for a moment as if en-

chanted by some sudden spell, and little had she been prepared for an interior, such as she now beheld.

Mr. Hamilton had once asked her if she had ever seen the late Lady de Crespigny's apartments, and had told her on her replying in the negative, that she must make the girls show them to her, as if they had been in some degree remarkable—she had only expected to see some rooms, fitted up perhaps with more of modern comfort, and the furniture in a greater degree of preservation, than most of the time worn relics of other days which characterised the mansion. It was with a degree of curiosity, however, that she desired to see the spot in which her brother and his wife had almost wholly existed; for, with the exception of the very warmest days of our short and uncertain summer, Lord and Lady de Crespigny had never passed from this suite of rooms, but to take exercise in the long picture gallery, kept at an equal temperature by

stoves, with that of the rooms they occupied. And there the two, tall, graceful figures might be seen slowly gliding along, and bounding by their side, like the spirit of love, the beautiful child Francesca, whilst often a dark, pale girl, for a time, might follow them unnoticed with timid steps and downcast eyes, but soon she would creep away unmissed, uncared for, like some alien spirit, unsuited to such fair company.

But here, instead of the tapestry walls and damask hangings, the ponderous, unwieldy furniture, the dark-framed portraits of stiff, formal faces, seeming ever to look down in melancholy and offended rebuke on the degenerate race of beings, who so unworthily filled their places—here the beholder might have fancied herself at once transported into a saloon of one of Italy's marble palaces. The delicate hangings— the articles of virtu placed upon the tesselated tables—the alabaster vases, and choicest specimens of art

which wealth could procure, both in graceful statues—and pictures depicting the fairest forms, as well as the most beautiful scenes of the sunny south—all were to be found here collected.

This had been done according to the orders of Lord de Creuspigny, previous to his making the dilapidated mansion his abode, having transferred to Shirley Hall many of the gems and furniture which had decorated his palace at Florence; and every arrangement was completed, which could indulge the capricious and fastidious taste of himself and his Italian wife. It was here that they had dreamt away the few remaining years of their life—surrounded by every outward object that could shut out from their sight and sense, the idea that they were in fact living in a dilapidated mansion of cold, sullen England, instead of in their cherished land of beauty and refinement.

"No wonder," Mrs. Gordon often thought,

"no wonder indeed that the child nurtured in the warm sunshine of such grace and loveliness should have imbibed its influence, while the other doomed to be an outcast from this oasis, to exist in the dreary gloom, which surrounded the spot of brightness, should have received so different an impression. But it was amidst this startling scene of luxury that Mrs. Gordon now found her. Giulia was seated upon the floor, her head resting upon a couch, whilst her eyes, swollen with weeping, were turned, as if she had been in converse, upon the figure of Nice, who stood before a superb crucifix of gold, which was one of the most conspicuous ornaments of the room.

The voice of the Italian girl was heard ere the door opened, but on the entrance of Mrs. Gordon and Francesca, she abruptly left off speaking, and began busily, and with apparent devotion, telling the beads of her rosary, when they appeared before her.

Francesca ran to her sister, and throwing her arms around her neck, said,

“ Oh, Giulia, here you are! we have been looking for you all over the house.”

There had been a more placid air on Giulia’s countenance when they first entered, but it again relapsed into its usual gloomy character, as releasing herself with a shrinking movement from her sister’s embrace, she arose, a locket falling from her bosom as she did so. Francesca hastily raised it from the floor, and began to compare it with her own.

“ Ah, mine has blue stones round it—blue, Claud told me, meant that I was not to forget him—and yours are green—I wonder what green means—do you know, Nice?” for looking up she caught the Italian girl’s eyes turned upon them with a sort of meaning smile upon her thin lips. “ And yours,” she continued chatting on, “ has no hair in it—oh, I like mine best—why did not you ask him for some

too? but you do not love him half as well as I do, Giulia."

Giulia, with an impatient gesture, turned away, and was about to follow Nice, whom Mrs. Gordon had in the meantime dismissed under pretext of a message. Taking her niece's hand to detain her, and also drawing Francesca towards her, she said in a gentle tone,

"Now that we are left alone together, we must endeavour to make ourselves as happy as possible, and as there can be no happiness for those, who do not dwell with each other in perfect concord, let us begin by resolving that peace may ever reign amongst us. However, my dear children, this will be a promise scarcely requisite to be exacted—for how can there be any other feeling than that of love and confidence between those linked so closely together, both by the ties of nature and of kindred. I have none others to love on earth, but my brother's orphan children—no other

desire for the future, but the promotion of their happiness and welfare—and I only ask in return, their love and confidence."

Little Francesca affectionately kissed her aunt's hand, whilst Giulia remained impenetrably silent.

"And, my dear children," Mrs. Gordon continued, "it will, I trust, be unnecessary to remind you, that left thus alone on earth, you must be each other's stay and comfort; for your own sake this must ever be, and for the sake of the parents, whose wishes you will best fulfil in loving one another.

"Dear Giulia," Mrs. Gordon continued, "will you promise not only to be the affectionate sister, but the example—the counsellor—the comforter, if so required, of this little girl, who I see is ready on her part to assure you of all the love, confidence, and even respect, which is due from a younger to an elder sister."

Francesca's liquid eyes were raised through

tearful smiles to her sister's face, as if waiting for an answering glance to sign the compact by an embrace, and the kind words of Mrs. Gordon seemed to have sweetened every tincture of bitterness in Giulia's heart, for she stretched out her arms to her sister, who threw herself on her bosom and wept.

CHAPTER VI.

“ There are who sigh, but no fond heart is theirs,
None loves them best.”

KEBBLE.

Mrs. GORDON was anxious, now that the ice seemed broken, by which, for the first time, she could find ingress to the pent up feelings of her niece, not to suffer her heart again to close, before she had spoken a few words which might be of advantage to her future conduct ; and when, after the sudden emotion of affection had in part subsided, and Giulia had dis-

engaged herself with something of returning coldness from the child's embrace, she whispered Francesca to follow Nice, and prepare for her walk, and Giulia was left alone with her aunt.

Mrs. Gordon allowed her eyes to wander around the room, over all its peculiar decorations ere she again spoke. Her attention was particularly attracted by one object, a picture which hung opposite the seat she had now chosen.

It was a full length portrait of the late Lady de Crespigny—her graceful form depicted reclining on a couch—her splendid eyes turned fondly on two children, Francesca and her brother, who stood by her side—the boy, a lovely, delicate creature, was pointing upwards, as if to direct his sister's attention to a brilliant sky above their heads. At their feet crouched a large Newfoundland dog.

It was a picture of beauty most truly calculated to strike the eye, and to awaken in

the heart feelings of melancholy interest, when the thought pressed upon the remembrance—reminding the beholder, that two of those lovely forms had passed like a summer's sun from the face of nature, leaving dark and desolate hearts to deplore their loss.

Mrs. Gordon, for a time, forgot all else—so deeply was she absorbed in contemplation—but when awakened from her abstraction, by a low sigh breathed by her side, she broke the silence by turning to Giulia, and exclaimed,

"How beautiful your mother must have been, Giulia!"

"Yea, beautiful," the latter replied in a low, hurried voice, "and so was my father and brother—and Francesca—all—all—beautiful—but me!"

Mrs. Gordon was for a moment at a loss how to answer—so much was she shocked by the tone of deep feeling with which these words were uttered—she however soon said,

"Oh, Giulia, beauty is, at its highest estimation, but a vain, perishable possession, often bringing with it many snares—many temptations; and should one, on whom her God has showered so many gifts, repine, because that all wise dispenser has denied an outward distinction—withheld in wisdom—in mercy no doubt?"

"But when the want of this gift, this envied boon," continued Giulia, in the same low voice, her eyes bent to the ground, "deprives me of all that can make life happy, how can I help coveting it?"

"Of all that can make life happy, Giulia?" repeated Mrs. Gordon with seriousness in her tone. "I never knew before that the happiness of any reasonable creature was dependent on so unsubstantial a possession."

"There can be no happiness for those who are not loved; and the beautiful only are loved," persisted Giulia, in a tone of hopeless dejection, and she turned her eyes as if for an

argument in favor of her assertion upon the picture before them, and was silent.

"You are mistaken, Giulia," Mrs. Gordon continued; "I have had more acquaintance with mankind, than you, my dear child, and I have seen those loved--yes, most fervently loved, who have possessed none of that outward ornament, which seems to have gained so high a value in your estimation--a value unworthy, I must say, of any right thinking, sensible mind, such a mind as I am willing to believe, you, my niece, possess. Beauty is an ornament, which the all-wise Creator has conferred, in common, to the lillies of the field, and the flowers which strew our path--given to please the eye, but never intended wholly to satisfy the heart. No; he has given us higher perfections, to confer and constitute true happiness--beauties which all may possess: and even granting your assertion to be true, 'that there is no happiness for those who are not loved,' you must be aware, that there exist

qualities much more calculated to gain, permanently, the hearts of all, than any mere perfection of form or feature. Giulia," continued Mrs. Gordon, with much earnestness; "have you ever tried what the exercise of these qualities may do, to ensure the affections of all around you? if not, begin, dear child, henceforth; do not poison every source of happiness by vain repining for absence of an imaginary blessing; for, believe me, the possession of great beauty, often proves a misery to the possessor."

Giulia shook her head incredulously.

"Aunt, you would not say so, if you had ever known what it was to have been like me; look there," and she pointed to the picture, "even there, I was denied a place amongst them—a dog preferred to the plain—unloved Giulia!—and, if I was not loved by them," she murmured in a low, agitated voice, "who can I expect to love me? Oh! my aunt," and Giulia raised her eyes now streaming with

tears, and clasped her hands convulsively together, "it is very terrible to feel, that you were not loved by those who are gone for ever!"

Mrs. Gordon was much affected by these words, and taking her niece's hands affectionately within her own, she strove to say all that was calculated to strengthen and comfort her for the past, and re-assure and give her hope for the future. She expatiated upon all the advantages the young Baroness possessed over others—all her responsibilities and powers in a worldly point of view—station—affluence, which are ever power; above all, talents to improve, and that by conferring happiness upon others, she might draw it upon herself. Mrs. Gordon strove to direct the young mind to the fountain-head of all true happiness and love—of peace and hope!—and concluded by entreating Giulia, with all the earnestness of sincere interest, to receive the promise of her own fervent love, and offered herself as her friend, her

counsellor—one to whom she implored her in future, to pour forth all her hopes, and fears, and sorrows."

The kind lady spoke such words of solace, that, at length, the poor girl's eyes began to brighten, her heart to beat with a relieved feeling, as if, for the first time, she beheld a less dreary prospect opening before her — the world appearing less dull and joyless.

Mrs. Gordon then spoke of the rich fount of happiness which was opened to her for future years, in the pure, warm love of her young sister—love ready to be poured forth upon her to her heart's content, if not frozen by repulsion ; but at Francesca's name, again Giulia's brow darkened. Mrs. Gordon perceiving the change, continued, " You say it was the beautiful, but I should rather imagine it was the loving who were beloved ; and confess, dear Giulia, that in such a case, you are the sinning, rather than the sinned against ; do you

meet love with love? You pine for affection, and yet, when it is offered to your grasp, do you not reject it? and from one too, who even were she not the sweet and engaging child nature has formed her, I should have thought your heart would have clung to eagerly—as your sister—your almost only relative upon earth. But no; I have marked that you receive her caresses with a coldness almost approaching to aversion, which has filled me with surprise."

"Francesca," exclaimed Giulia, moodily, "possesses enough of love without mine; she draws every heart from me; what can she wish for more? She needs no pity, all bow before her influence—the very animals turn from me as she approaches; she has ever monopolized, and will ever claim the love of all those whom I could have loved!"

"Giulia," said her aunt, in a voice of grave remonstrance, "the feeling which prompts these words, is, I fear, much at variance with

those inward feelings which constitute your happiness; if your young sister is so generally loved, as you say, I should imagine that is rather from her kind manner, her affectionate disposition, than her beauty."

"Ah, yes my aunt," replied Giulia, with a bitter tone; "she is, indeed, an object for me to envy; and you will find, as all have done, how impossible it will be to bestow the love you promised to me, whilst Francesca is at hand! Yes," she exclaimed, with greater excitement, "it was not enough that during all our lives, she should have been my parents' only thought and care; but in their last moments they remembered only her—at least, my mother. She sent for me, and I hastened to her side, hoping for some tender words to treasure up for the future—but no; it was to speak only of Francesca—to bid me watch over her, and guard her from every care, every sorrow, and then to receive a cold kiss of gratitude for my promise—not one of

love towards myself!—and I will keep that promise, when it is required; but it never will be wanted—Francesca will have all that I can care for—and oh! willingly would I give up every seeming advantage I possess—my empty title — my valueless riches, to change places with her — what are riches and title to me?"

" Dear Giulia," said her aunt, " you distress me to hear you talk thus—and I trust, I shall soon find you blaming yourself for your present unhappy imaginations — you would not have deemed yourself so uncared for, if you had heard last night the interest and affection expressed for you by Claud Hamilton."

The colour suffused the face of Giulia, and she said in a low and tremulous voice,

" Yes, Claud is kind and pities me, but he too, before he went, came to talk of Francesca, to ask me for his sake to love her more

—no, there is but one who, I believe, really cares for me. Nice does not consider me beneath a little affection ; and yet,” she continued, the colour mounting to her cheeks, “ even the consolation of her friendship they seem to grudge me, for it was but just now that Nice was complaining that nurse and others amongst the domestics whisper insinuations, that it was only since I took possession of my title, that she evinced affection towards me. And thus you see, my aunt, how it is with one like me ; the beautiful—the engaging—are always sure of being loved for their own individual merit—those in my position must ever be looking out for some double motive in the affection which is shewn towards them.”

Again Mrs. Gordon expatiated on the folly —nay sin—of this suspicious and jealous tendency in the disposition of the young girl, and pointed out how detrimental it would prove

to all happiness, contrary as it was to a true spirit of christian humility and dignity of soul ; for does not the great poet say,

" True dignity abides with him alone
Who in the silent hour of inward thought
Can still suspect, and still revere himself
In lowness of heart."

And that the man whose eye

" Is ever on himself, does look on one
The least of nature's works—
One who might move
The wise man to that scorn which
Wisdom holds unlawful ever."

Mrs. Gordon further observed, that though such tenacious feelings with regard to herself might be disguised under the garb of humility, it was still, in truth, pride and ingratitude against her God, who had been so bountiful towards her. However the good lady felt, that all she could say must fail upon a mind so corroded, that many efforts must be made before any of the rust of prejudice could be removed. She trusted however that her words

were not totally without effect, for the clouds had again, in a measure, dispersed from Giulia's brow, and they were preparing to join the others, when the handle of the door turned, and an ancient, stately figure entered the room.

It was the housekeeper, Mrs. Rivers, who had come, she said, hearing that Mrs. Gordon was there, to consult with her according to the orders of Mr. Hamilton, as to the propriety of placing in cases, the valuables which adorned the apartment, for their better preservation; and as the old woman delivered her speech with the stiff dignity peculiar to her, she cast, ever and anon, a glance around her, with an expression of grave displeasure—a slight shudder passing over her features, as her eyes rested for a moment on the crucifix—and she half closed her eyes, as if to shut out from their sight, what she considered an abomination; for Mrs. Rivers was a rigid puritan in her ideas.

This woman was of a peculiar character altogether, and worthy of a few words of description.

At Shirley Hall she had passed her life, and seemed to have imbibed the gloomy character of the abode, and become as one of the ancient pieces of furniture. Her life had truly been one of sombre monotony, which might have solemnised the most naturally vivacious of spirits.

The old Hall, since it had been under her dominion, had never been but accidentally made the abode of the family, so she had vegetated in her gloomy parlour, with its small paned window, and high chimney piece, decorated with old fashioned china ornaments, in company with her cat and her lark, her knitting and her bible, seldom going abroad, except to attend the church. Now and then, however, the monotony of her existence was disturbed, by the startling echo of the door bell, obliging her to rise from her high-backed

chair, to move with tardy steps to admit some sight-seeing pilgrim, who, attracted by the romantic loneliness which was the reputation of the old Hall, had thence been tempted to approach its dark precincts. And how awed would be the intruder, who thus ventured on this voyage of discovery, by the solemn stillness of the dusky chambers, and gloomy galleries, and by the stern and stately bearing of his cicerone, as she sailed before him in her sweeping serge and stiff muslin cap, silently throwing open the doors, and in a solemn voice giving every information she considered strictly incumbent on her, but not a word beyond ; except, indeed, some occasional individual was fortunate enough to gain her fastidious favour; and then she would not consider it beneath her dignity to pause and relate some local tradition, some legend connected with one of the ancient portraits, or mysterious spots. And thus she would have been well contented to pass the remainder of her life, for though

rigidly attached to the family in which she had been born and bred, she considered its present representative, by his long desertion of his country, and above all by his taking to himself a foreign and a popish wife, to have lost nearly all claim to retain a place in her affections.

It was therefore with no feeling of satisfaction that she received orders, after the death of the boy, to prepare for the reception of himself and his popish family.

The sad event of the loss of the young heir, Mrs. Rivers considered in the light of a signal judgment for his father's heresy; nor did the fanciful tastes, and peculiar mode of existence of himself and lady, the foreign air and attributes of all around them, serve to remove the old domestic's prejudice; however, with dignified patience she performed the part of a faithful servant till the time of their death, and now continued with unabated fidelity to pursue the duties connected with the present cir-

cumstances under which she beheld herself destined to move.

To these changes she was in no small degree reconciled, by the fact of Mrs. Gordon, who was to hold the place of her superior, being an uncontaminated scion of the house she considered it her duty to serve—and one whose mild and gentle dignity, whilst it satisfied her ideas, as to what a de Crespigny should be, threatened no violent monopoly and demonstration of her own rights in the mansion where she had ever been “the Monarch of all she surveyed.”

As for the two girls, she could not yet reconcile to her mind the idea of their half foreign birth and attributes.

Upon the Baroness she rather looked with contempt, as the representative of a house never before possessing a female at its head, and moreover one endowed with so meagre a share, of the beauty and dignity of the de Crespignys.

Even Francesca's beauty and attractions she did her utmost to withstand. Her loveliness was of so different a character from the usual style of the de Crespignys' countenance, that the peculiarity was of itself a sin in her eyes—and the joyful cheerfulness of the little girl's disposition, fain would the old woman have ascribed, to the levity inherent to all foreigners, and which it was therefore incumbent on all to check by restraint and discipline. Truly her voice alone was ever raised to check Francesca's wild and childish mirth—she was the only creature who seemed to resist the engaging wiles with which the captivating child, rendered fearless by general indulgence, would endeavour sometimes to soften the asperity, of almost the only individual who did not load her with favours and caresses. And Nice—she and Mrs. Rivers could scarcely breathe the same air together—the former crossing herself if they chanced to meet—the latter drawing aside, and standing contract-

ing her slim person against the wall as if fearful that their garments even should come in contact.

Regarding the subject on which she came to consult Mrs. Gordon, her mind was soon set at rest, and settled to her entire satisfaction. A few days after, the golden crucifix was consigned to its case, and all the foreign ornaments were placed in safe receptacles. The furniture was despoiled of its delicate hangings and decorations; and when the girls stole timidly in, the day after these dilapidations had taken place, Francesca burst into tears, and said that she would never enter within those doors again, for that it was no longer "Mama's room." But to Giulia, it became a favorite retreat—its beauty had departed, but its dreary desolation suited "the gloomy habit of her soul," and to this spo Nice often followed her.

CHAPTER VII.

" The embryo thought, the mind
Unhappened—the wild bounding of the soul,
Elate and buoyant with new-breathed existence—
Claim your soft guidance, ask for pity's sake,
Your most religious love.

* * * * *

* * * Heaven bless thy task,
And crown thy hope!

LAWSON.

Mrs. Gordon was not bitten by the mania for education. She was no friend to what is called systematic training—that process which, unmindful of difference in mind and intellect,

would fain cut out a straight line on which all alike were to pursue their course—the same series of accomplishments and knowledge being forced indiscriminately upon each, to the ruin often of any particular talent or taste, which may have chanced to be inherently possessed by the child.

She, therefore, looked upon the neglected education of her nieces as no very great misfortune, even though Giulia was at an age, when it is considered necessary for young ladies of almost every rank to be under the experienced hands of a finishing governess. Mrs. Gordon had even discouraged Mr. Hamilton's proposal of sending an instructress down immediately to the hall, much to the relief of Giulia, who looked upon the plan with unfeigned aversion.

Mrs. Gordon wished for more time before she formed any arrangement; she desired to ascertain more accurately the peculiar qualifications and bent of her niece's mind—and she

was eventually satisfied that she had done wisely in so acting. It was evident that Lady De Crespiigny's mind must not be futher irritated and oppressed, or her spirits more curbed by the dull routine of a regular school-room education. As to accomplishments, those she already possessed, Mrs. Gordon considered sufficient, without forcing upon her others for which she demonstrated neither taste nor desire. In languages, Giulia particularly excelled ; on commencing with her the study of German, her aunt was astonished at the readiness with which she mastered its difficulties.

The musical education of the Baroness had not been entirely neglected ; for once in the week, the organist from the neighbouring cathedral town had been in the habit of visiting the Hall, and instructing the two girls, Giulia and Nice, upon the only tolerable instrument in the house—an organ which

had been moved for that purpose from the music gallery above the hall into the library —and though the Baronesse did not seem to possess much taste for the science, it was with no contemptible power that she could awaken its solemn tones.

In the deeper studies, Mrs. Gordon found that it was necessary rather to reduce into some palpable form, and bring to profit, the heterogeneous mass of information she had accumulated. The aunt wondered not that all elasticity and liveliness of intellect had been repressed, when she discovered that this girl of fifteen, had, during the four years in which that gloomy library had been her almost constant habitation, waded through half, at least, of the most abstruse and deep works which filled the shelves ; and Mrs. Gordon readily imagined, that unassisted by conversation and explanation from a wiser head, such reading could only have darkened and

confused her young mind. Few works of fiction were mingled in this antique collection, and those she had been forbidden to read.

Dante, indeed, her father had given to her, and she nearly knew it by heart. Mrs. Gordon determined that she should commence a more judicious and restricted course of reading, and at the same time sought to lighten and amuse her mind. She therefore put into her hands works of imagination, both in prose and verse, and there was at this time a fair field for Giulia's *debut* in this branch of literature. The Great Unknown was sending forth the first fruits of his bewitching powers of mind and imagination, whilst, at the same time, many of the poetic spirits of our age were starting forth to light, in all their maiden freshness.

At first it seemed difficult to Giulia to

bestow her interest upon that which was not true—but this did not long continue. Soon she found herself revelling in all the entrancing fascination of, as it were, a new world—a world of imagination!

It was a strange delight to the young girl to be lost in its mazes, and she would forget, for a while, that the outer world was so dull and uninviting. There was a smiling Paradise ever now open to her—the Paradise of fancy!—and therein she would revel—in imagination personifying herself with the beautiful—the loved—the high-minded—with whom she had held converse in her dreams. The dim flickering visions, which had vaguely haunted her from her earliest childhood, now assumed palpable forms—but no longer as before—irritating and tantalizing her mind with undefined conceptions of unknown delights.

Mrs. Gordon was ignorant of all this; she foresaw no peculiar excitement to the mind of

the cold girl from the studies she rather encouraged her to pursue—she remembered not that

“Light flashes in the gloomiest sky,
And music in the dullest plain,”

and that the pleasures of imagination, unless nourished with more substantial food,

“Than fancy with her shadowy toys,
Ærial hopes and pensive joys,’

will lead the mind at last to vacuity, when contact with the world brings with it, its attendant disappointments; repinings—longings after the ideal joys, which have faded at the near approach of stern reality, though some indeed there may be, who have learnt

“To quit with eye serene
Their youth’s ideal horde.”

In Giulia’s case, perhaps, it would have been

safer not to have nurtured this taste for living in a world of romance ; in our best intentions, how often do we err !

It was with very different feelings and purposes that Mrs. Gordon contemplated the prospect of Francesca's education ; with unmixed pleasure she looked forward to the fulfilment of this work. Here indeed seemed a garden to cultivate, as fair as that of Eden, ere thorns and briars had arisen to encumber the ground—all natural loveliness and freshness, with bright but budding flowers to cultivate, and choice fruits to nurture into perfection.

And none should rob her, she determined, of a share in this pleasant task—that of forming a character, to show the world

“ How sweet a thing a woman may be made ! ”

It would be her aim, her study, to ward off every mark of care, or sin, from furrowing

"her yet unwritten brow," and to preserve in all its bright freshness, the innocence and simplicity of the fair child. And she must still do more--she must fortify the heart of the young girl, that she might henceforth be, not only a specimen of gentle loveliness--but have strength to withstand the snares, which even that prized loveliness might bring upon her.

She found it indeed a more difficult matter than she had imagined, to guard against poor Giulia's prophesy, that she "would not be able to resist the superior fascination of Francesca," but even this difficulty had its advantage; inasmuch as it caused Mrs. Gordon to guard more narrowly against any outward demonstration which could evince her preference for either sister. She endeavoured to bring Giulia as much forward as possible--striving to make her feel her own importance in life--her position amongst the servants, and the surrounding dependents and poor, as a mis-

tress---a benefactress! thus counteracting as much as possible, any feeling of jealousy, her sister's superior attentions might excite in her mind. At times Mrs. Gordon trusted she was succeeding.

She also tried to exact from the little girl a respect and deference for her sister, perhaps rather overstrained, considering their relationship to each other, but Mrs. Gordon fancied that much of the alienation of Giulia's manner towards Francesca, arose from the wounds her tenacious spirit received from the thoughtless words of her sister; a freedom of speech engendered by the perfect indulgence and liberty she had ever been so freely allowed ---and which, though from others they provoked a smile, often touched the sensitive Giulia to the quick. This failing, as well as every tendency to what Mrs. Rivers might denominate levity of manners, her aunt strove carefully to check; but then the bewitching sweetness with which Francesca received re-

buke—her earnest, humble entreaties for forgiveness when she had occasionally erred, made even her little faults only so many additional snares to Mrs. Gordon's heart—and she would wonder how it was possible that Giulia could ever withstand her influence.

Still there were moments when Mrs. Gordon's sanguine hopes, that the young Baroness's heart was becoming softened, were clouded by seeing the tearful efforts of Francesca for reconciliation, after some childlike quarrel, coldly rejected by Giulia. The good lady knew not the secret spirit of all this mischief—the spirit which glided about in silence and unheeded, poisoning the healthful current of any good that she might attempt—counter-acting every plan—altering the bias of the minds which came under its control !

Mrs. Gordon, with equal care and attention, superintended the studies of Nice, and with persevering kindness strove to discover a clue, by which she might act with regard to this

incomprehensible girl, but her success did not satisfy her wishes. There seemed ever, a smooth, glossy surface opposed to her endeavours to penetrate into the character of the Italian. Ably and readily, though without any particular application or interest, she learnt all that was imparted to her, giving evidence of nothing reprehensible in her conduct; no particular failing afforded Mrs. Gordon a pretext for correction — nor was there any virtue or amiability to encourage in aught she said or did. Nice ever observed an unobtrusive humility of demeanour in the presence of Mrs. Gordon, which rendered it difficult to bring forth her sentiments or desires. She met Mrs. Gordon's extreme kindness with an appearance of courteous gratitude, rather than with the warm confidence of youth ; and it was only through the medium of Giulia or Francesca, that any wish or desire of the young girl ever came to Mrs. Gordon's ears.

Over the Baroness and her sister, the Italian girl seemed to exercise a quiet, unobtrusive influence; particularly was this influence manifest in its dominion over Giulia, indeed it was evident, that Francesca yielded to the sway, rather from the inherent kindly impulses of her nature, than from confiding love towards Nice.

CHAPTER VIII.

" I fear thee, and thy glittering eye.

* + * * +

Now, wherefore stopp'st thou me?"

ANCIENT MARINER.

IT was at the celebration of Mass at the little Roman Catholic Chapel in the town of ——, one Sunday in the February following, that the devotion of an individual of the congregation was evidently disturbed,

she too, who ever performed her part with a demeanour of the strictest propriety; but now, even at the awful moment of the elevation of the host, it required a touch, and a reproving look from her companion—an old Italian servant who always accompanied her—ere she bowed her head with the rest of the worshippers, for her eyes had fixed themselves, as if fascinated, on one single object — her blanched cheeks, and look almost of horror, telling at once that it was no very agreeable fascination.

And truly it was not, for in the person of the tall, dark stranger, who had thus riveted her attention, Nice beheld one, who she imagined was destined to be the agent of some sudden and no very welcome change in her existence !

When the service was concluded, the object of her terror disappeared amidst the crowd, but it was with more of desperation than relief that she arose, and with hurried steps

and suspended breath, hastened towards the chapel, but ere she reached it, she heard her name murmured in an accent, which it might have been judged, would have imparted a thrill of joy to her heart—for it was that of her own country, and she was in a land of strangers. The sound, however, caused her to turn with no gesture of pleasure, and there she beheld, glittering and fascinating like a serpent's, a pair of eyes so like her own that they might have been taken for the same.

“Send the servant away, and make some excuse for remaining alone with me!” whispered the stranger, in a voice of command; and the girl with a look of despair, but without any attempt to evade the offer, waited till the servant, who had been separated by the crowd, joined her; she then dismissed her on some pretended message from Mrs. Gordon, to a person who lived at a short distance, saying she would wait for her return in the chapel. The servant dis-

appeared; and the last lingering members of the congregation at length departed.

Nice scarcely waited to receive a benediction from her newly restored relative, but joining her hands tightly together, and raising her eyes with eager wildness, she gasped out,

“My uncle!—are you come to take me away—to immure me within a convent’s walls?”

A contemptuous smile curled the thin lips of him, thus addressed, as he looked down upon his young niece, who thus met him after a separation of many years, and said,

“I see, my daughter, that, at least, you have not learned in England, either to conceal your feelings, or to assume those which you do not really possess; and yet from that countenance, I should have thought otherwise.”

“I know from whom I should conceal my
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feelings, and to whom I may reveal them," interposed the girl, quickly, as if recalled to her presence of mind; "to whom should I be sincere, if not to you — my uncle?"

" But you were not overjoyed at beholding the relative who was the father of your childhood ; or rather, is it that you are unwilling to relinquish your present position, to enter upon your destined course of life?"

Nice cast her eyes to the ground, and murmured,

" Not yet, I beseech you, my uncle—not yet."

" Well, weak girl, relieve your mind ; at present, weightier matters bring me to England than you, or your concerns ; but you have a part to play. And," he added, with a stern voice and severe expression of countenance, " remember—however you may have learnt the art of concealment, to me, every thought and

feeling of your heart must be confessed ; every event which happens around you, must be revealed ; in hiding aught from me, you will sin both against God and man—for am I not your spiritual father, as well as your near relation ? It is only by discovering that this heretic country has produced upon you any baneful effect, that your instant removal will be the certain consequence ; I shall then lose no time in hurrying you where severe discipline might cure you of its deteriorating influence."

Nice appeared to require no threat to induce her to communicativeness ; even anticipating all that he might have wished to know,—without difficulty, her uncle drew from her every particular relating to the *menage* of the hall, since the death of Lord and Lady De Crespigny—each circumstance relating to its inhabitants—nay, even the individual characters of each—of Mrs. Gordon, the Baroness ! nor was the little Francesca forgotten in

the enquiries. The precocity of discernment discovered in the course of this examination, seemed greatly to raise his young niece in the estimation of the priest—for it was the Abbé Cellini, whom we have introduced to our readers. He no longer looked upon her as a child, but proceeded cautiously to enlighten her upon subjects, which must have appeared somewhat mysterious to a girl of Nice's age and inexperience, but which she received with no embarrassing air of wonder—no simple question difficult to evade, or answer plainly! With as much comprehensive ease, as if she had been reared in the Pope's palace, instead of amidst the uneventful monotony of Shirley Hall, she seized upon every idea, and when, at last, their conference was interrupted by the sight of the servant returning from her mission, Nice hastened to meet her, complaining of her long absence. The woman wondered what made the Signora Nice's eyes sparkle even with more than usual brilliancy, and mar-

velled what she had found in the dismal chapel to excite her so greatly; for during their drive home, she more than once observed a smile tremble on her lips, as if some feeling of newly awakened pleasure was moving in her breast.

And indeed it was an ecstatic sensation which filled the Italian girl's heart. She felt as if she had at length found something for which she had long thirsted—some active means of employing the secret talents, she felt had been growing with her growth, and strengthening with her strength. No indication of these feelings however shewed themselves upon her countenance, as Nice silently as usual, glided into the house, and took her accustomed seat, on her return home.

The following day, at the moment when the setting sun was gilding the tops of the leafless branches, a stranger passed slowly down the avenue. He was a man of a tall, but bent frame, wrapped in the folds of a large black

cloak. His hat was slouched over his eyes, which curiously scanned the venerable pile he was approaching. "And this," he soliloquised, "is one of those ancient seats of the country, in which we once possessed such power," and he turned his eyes upon the eastern wing, which, surmounted by a stone cross, indicated that part which had formerly been a Catholic Chapel.

"Here we were wont to glide in and out at pleasure, and gain dominion over every heart and conscience within those walls, and why should we not do so now again, why should we not again plant our standard on this little Island, which has so proudly shaken off the yoke of our Holy Mother? Much doubtless of this mischief," continued to muse the stranger, "is owing to the cold apathy of our brethren in England. Witness on this spot an instance. Did not a peer and peeress of the realm live for years amongst them, and die, without any open declaration, or demonstration that they

were members of our church. Holy Mother! and we can afford to lose none, not one soul however insignificant! It is even by these small beginnings that we must endeavour to gain ground; we must commence by single individuals ere we can hope for numbers, and here must my efforts be exerted—here, where for lack of persevering zeal, two representatives of a noble house, to whom we have a right to lay claim, as having been baptised in our faith, have fallen from our hands, to be reared in heresy! And shall this be done without an attempt to save them, now when they are weak and young, when, to obtain the salvation of their souls, no barrier is opposed but the resistance of a powerless woman, who perchance may be easily won, by a little address."

A disdainful smile played upon the lip of the stranger.

"It will be difficult to circumvent me,"

he thought—" I have seldom failed. Have I not bowed the understanding of the wise and learned? I fear not to be baffled by a woman and two children."

He now paused in his meditations, for having closely approached the house, the Italian perceived that he was not unobserved. A little Italian greyhound sprung barking towards him, and casting his eyes in the direction from whence it came, he perceived a little girl, a few yards distant, standing gazing at him. Instead of entering the court, he immediately crossed from the path over the lawn or paddock, which spread around the house, towards the spot where she stood, at the same time rebuking Arno's inhospitable greeting in a few Italian words. The dog hearing himself addressed, in a language he was accustomed to receive only from the few with whom he was familiar, ceased his barking, and changed it for friendly caresses and gambols.

On Francesca too, he had produced something of the same effect, for on first perceiving the tall, dark stranger turn off the path to approach her—with his eyes glaring at her from under his slouched hat, her heart beat quickly, and the colour mounted in torrents to her cheeks. She thought he must be a robber—and though, she did not like to leave Arno behind, still she was on the point of running away. But at the sound of the Italian words—her mother's own language, her fear changed into curiosity, and she stood gazing on the man, with parted lips, and searching eyes.

Francesca however stepped back a few paces, when he familiarly placed his hand upon her head, from which her straw bonnet was pushed back, and said, looking earnestly in her face,

“ Sia la Signorina de Crespigny ?”

“ Si Signor,” she answered, recoiling a step,

but with her eyes fixed with still more curiosity and scrutiny on his face.

"And you do not know who I am, I conclude," he continued, "yet often have I held you in these arms."

"Oh yes! I think I do," Francesca answered readily.

"You do? then Nice," he thought, "has played me false after all! Your memory must be very retentive, young lady," the Italian continued aloud, "for whom then do you take me?"

"I think you must be Nice's papa—no, her uncle—whom she talks about sometimes."

"And why do you think so? Did Nice tell you she expected me?"

"Oh, no—but because no one but her relation could have eyes so exactly the same."

"Your eyes, young lady, are very discerning," answered the priest, "but where is

Nice? Will your aunt, do you think, allow me to enter to see my niece?"

"Oh, yes, come this way, and I will take you to her," and Francesca ran round the corner of the house followed by her new acquaintance.

CHAPTER IX.

" Oh that it were as it were wont to be !
When thy old friends of fire—all full of thee
Fought against frowns with smiles, gave glorious chase
To persecutions, and against the face
Of death, and fiercest dangers, durst with brave
And sober pace, march on to meet a grave.'

CRASHAW.

THE occupants of the library, namely Mrs. Gordon, Giulia and Nice, did not at first look up from their several occupations, when Francesca's light form sprang in among them ; but when the scanty remainder of light, which the

waning evening had left to them, was obstructed by a dark body passing before the window, they raised their eyes, and with a start, not unmixed with alarm, beheld so unexpected, and, at first sight, appalling an intruder.

"Do not be frightened, Giulia!" exclaimed Francesca, "I thought he was a robber at first, but he is only Nice's uncle come to see her."

Mrs. Gordon now bowed, and in a deep but musical voice, the stranger authenticated the statement, with apologies for his intrusion—whilst Nice, acting the part of an affectionate niece, better than on the preceding day—advanced eagerly towards him, and then, as if overwhelmed by respectful awe, stood timidly gazing at her revered relative, who murmuring in a low voice, "Nice, la mia nipote!" laid his hand upon her head and blessed her—then turning to Mrs. Gordon, said,

"May I also be allowed to greet the child of her, I once loved as a daughter, and who

accorded me the love and reverence due to the holy and spiritual relationship in which I stood towards her?"

Receiving an assenting inclination from Mrs. Gordon, he performed the same part towards the Baronesse, pronouncing, as he laid his hand upon her head, a fervent benediction. Then followed more minute explanations : he informed Mrs. Gordon that being obliged to visit England on matters of business, natural feelings had moved him with the desire of beholding his young relative, and personally enquiring after her welfare, both of soul and body. Time pressing—for he was soon to depart for Ireland—had made him venture to waive the ceremony of a letter to announce his arrival.

Of course, whatever might have been her secret feelings, Mrs. Gordon considered that in the name of courtesy and hospitality, she could do no less than offer accommodation for the night to the stranger, who had come so

far to see his young relative, and also claimed the right of consideration as the friend of her nieces' parents—she therefore proposed despatching a servant to the village for his luggage.

This plan was gratefully accepted. Mrs. Gordon then left the room, taking with her the two young de Crespignys, in order to allow Nice to have a private interview with her uncle. The good lady blamed herself for the inhospitable feelings which filled her mind; she felt that it rebelled against the idea of the priest, and she was angry with herself for the prejudice, which certainly had its origin in the religion of her guest.

To give orders concerning the accommodation of the visitor, was now her next care, and the scene which consequently followed, was not much calculated to raise her spirits.

Mrs. Gordon had repaired straightway to Mrs. Rivers, to inform her of the unexpected arrival, and although she had not looked for

a very cordial reception of the intelligence, she was quite startled by the consternation into which the news plunged the old lady. Had she announced the entrance of a wolf within the walls of the hall, Mrs. Rivers could not have testified more unfeigned horror and alarm. A Roman Catholic priest allowed to sleep beneath the same roof! admitted to familiar intercourse, with the two young children, upon whose danger she expatiated, in such mysterious terms of pity, and on whom she cast such looks of commiseration, that even Giulia turned pale, and Francesca, half crying, asked if "the tall, dark man were really a robber?"

" You view this matter, Mrs. Rivers, in too serious a light," Mrs. Gordon interposed, " I cannot foresee danger to any of us, from the mere circumstance of receiving, for one night, this person — it would not be creditable to us, as professors of Protestant charity, to turn away a stranger claiming right over our

hospitality, solely because he happens to be a Roman Catholic priest — we must also remember, that he is the uncle of la Signora Nice.

"Oh, that girl!" ejaculated Mrs. Rivers, "I knew she would not fail to bring evil upon this house. Well!" she continued, turning to Mrs. Gordon, "may it be as you say—but can a wolf be admitted into a fold, or a serpent into a nest, and no harm be expected?"

With an air of stern resignation, the old woman raised her ponderous Bible from its usual resting place on her window seat, and locked it within an oaken press, as if she already contemplated the hand of the priest, stretched forth to deprive her of its possession.

Under her superintendence, soon after, one of the remotest, and somewhat of the most dilapidated apartments of the mansion was made ready for the unwelcome guest; and, although the housemaid ventured a compas-

sionate suggestion as to the dismal locality of the apartment — tradition having attached to it many a tale of ghosts and goblins, the housekeeper made no remark but a grim smile, which accompanied the inward desire, that all the spiritual inhabitants of the invisible world, might rise that night to scare away the bloody Papist from its precincts.

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Gordon had to return to the library, to play the part of the courteous hostess to the unconscious object of so much ill-will. Francesca, after all she had heard, carefully avoided, that evening, any close contact with one who seemed so suspicious a character ; whilst Giulia sat silently, but with earnest curiosity, observing this singular and sudden addition to their little circle.

The priest, disengaged of his hat and cloak, presented to the eye, a tall, strong, but meagre form, not destitute of a certain graceful dignity. His face was of a decided Italian

cast, and the strongly marked expression of his countenance seemed scarcely in character with the air of benign gentleness now depicted upon it.

The conversation of the Italian flowed on in a clear, easy vein, and assisted by the tones of a deep, and not unmusical voice, insensibly riveted the attention and interest. The subject of discourse was chiefly relative to his own country—its condition at that period—the beauties both of nature and art for which Italy was so renowned, interspersed with anecdotes of incident and adventure, many of an absorbing and exciting interest.

At first, Fra Paolo addressed himself almost exclusively to Mrs. Gordon, but meeting once the serious eyes of Giulia riveted with eager attention upon his countenance, with a bland and encouraging smile, he began to direct his remarks to her as he continued to speak.

At first, his attention seemed rather to

discompose the shy girl, for she coloured violently at the idea of having thus attracted his attention ; till gradually, she forgot aught else in the interest with which his conversation inspired her, and sat with her gaze fastened on the dark, fascinating eyes which were fixed upon her—her pale cheeks flushing, her expression brightening, her breath suspended with almost painful interest. Mrs. Gordon had never before seen her niece under the impulse of such excitement, and marvelled at the effect produced upon the usually apathetic girl.

But the new mood in which she beheld Giulia, rather annoyed than pleased her aunt, and she felt relieved when the usual hour arrived, and the two elder girls retired for the night—although it left her *tête-à-tête* with the dark-looking priest.

The subject then turned on the late Lord and Lady de Crespigny, and, for the first time, Fra Paolo touched upon religious matters.

He mentioned the doubt that was entertained, concerning their views at the time of their death.

"And the daughters," he enquired, "though baptized in the Roman Catholic faith, are they not educated as Protestants?"

Mrs. Gordon briefly assented, and feeling no desire to enter upon so delicate a subject, endeavoured to turn the conversation into a different channel. They spoke of Nice, and Mrs. Gordon enquired what were his views concerning her?

Fra Paolo spoke with gratitude of all the kindness which had been bestowed upon her, and requested that she might still be permitted to remain with them for a few years longer.

"She would then," he added, "be of an age to take upon herself the vows of a convent life."

On ascending to her bed-chamber, after seeing the priest set forth, escorted by a guide through the mazes of passages, leading to the

spectral apartment Mrs. Rivers had fixed upon as his dormitory, Mrs. Gordon was surprised to find Giulia awaiting her arrival.

She had come, she said, to request her aunt to endeavour to prevail on *Fra Paolo* to remain for a few days, for poor Nice was quite unhappy, and was weeping at the idea of seeing, but for so brief a moment, her only remaining relative on earth—and whom she might never behold again. Giulia seemed completely to enter into this interesting feint of natural feeling, so strongly awakened in her friend's bosom, and with much animation told her tale.

On Mrs. Gordon answering coldly, and with somewhat of hesitation to her pathetic appeal, she appeared hurt and even offended, and the aunt, unwilling to give the young girl pain, and thus appear unkind by refusing a request—which after all she could scarcely justify herself in doing—jestingly reminding her of Mrs. Rivers's indignation, she dismissed her to

relieve the suspense of the affectionate niece by promising that Fra Paolo should receive an invitation to remain at Shirley Hall the following day.

" You are very considerate, Signora, very kind," said the priest when they met the next morning, " and it is not for me to disregard the right and natural feelings of this young girl," and he passed his hand over the head of Nice, who with becoming eagerness for his reply was gazing upon him.

" Her desire to see more of me, I can perfectly imagine, and her feelings are in accordance with my own--besides the happiness it will be to me to enjoy your society, Signora, and that of the two children of my departed friends : to form their friendship is now the first wish of my heart," and he bent on Giulia a look of kind though serious interest.

" There is much, no doubt, of curious research in this relic of the ancient habitations of the nobles of your land," the priest con-

tinued to say, “and in its examination I shall be well pleased; I will therefore gladly avail myself of your hospitable invitation.”

Mrs. Gordon received these courteous expressions of readiness to accept her renewed invitation, with cold, resigned civility. She did not consider it necessary that her nieces should omit their usual studies on account of their guest, therefore left him with Nice, but in the afternoon, Lady de Crespigny and her sister joined them, and Fra Paolo escorted by the girls, set forth on a voyage of inspection through the house, Mrs. Gordon promising to join them, when she had dispatched her letters of business.

It was somewhat of a solemn little party, for the sanctimonious dignity of the priest's demeanour imposed a feeling of awe; and Giulia, as she walked by his side, breathlessly listened to every word that fell from his lips. Interesting indeed were the observations Fra Paolo made on every object worthy of remark

that met his view. It seemed to the young girl as if an oracle had spoken, and it was at the same time with a thrill of gratification, that she marked with what condescending attention this man, famed for the deep learning which was conspicuous in every word he uttered, would listen, seemingly with approving consideration, to any communication or comment she timidly ventured to make. And then he would question her as to her pursuits —her tastes—expressing himself pleased and surprised, when he gradually discovered her taste for literature, and the extent to which it had been indulged.—Fra Paolo ended by requesting that Lady de Crespigny would be his guide in examining the treasures of the library; in short, Giulia's heart was soon beating fast with nervous exhilaration, at finding herself in so new a position. Francesca flitted about as unheeded as would have been the butterfly in their path, whilst she, who had hitherto deemed herself the neglected,

was now receiving all the notice and consideration, which generally fell to the lot of her captivating little sister.

They passed into the chapel—not the least interesting feature of the house ; although adapted as it had been to the rites of the Protestant service, it was supposed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, still it bore every trace of its original character ; a window above the altar, bearing the remains—though much defaced by time—of rare workmanship, representing the Passion of our Saviour.

A dilapidated confessional still remained, and though there was a small door leading out of the hall, by which the family generally entered, as well as one which led into the grounds, it had been so constructed, that the followers of their religion—mass having been at the period declared illegal—might disappear through different doors, leading to private staircases of the mansion.

“ And here then,” exclaimed the priest, after

reverently crossing himself, and bowing before the ancient altar piece, "here young lady," and he turned his eyes with a penetrating gaze on Giulia as she stood by his side, "on this sacred spot, your ancestors worshipped in the faith, which their descendants were tempted to forsake, but of which these remnants will stand a monument, till that day, when the wicked one, working in the strife of heresy and disobedience, shall be destroyed, and our Holy Mother the Church again shall have regained her dominion over the earth," and the priest raised his eyes and clasped his hands with an expression of decent and humble triumph, a sunbeam glancing through the stained glass, and shedding its gleam over his fine features.

"Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth!" cried a stern voice, which seemed to proceed from over their heads.—All started, and raised their

eyes to the place whence the sound came. A withered face was seen for a moment, and then disappeared—a slight frown of surprise contracted for a moment the brow of the Italian, but Nice whispered to him a few words of explanation, and as if no such irreverent interruption had occurred, he continued, but in a somewhat more suppressed tone.

“I know not how it is, but as I stand in this once sanctified spot, something seems to whisper to my heart, that the time may not be far distant, when the holy ceremonies of our blessed faith may again be celebrated within these walls, and with clouds of fragrant incense rise to Heaven; the true priests in their gorgeous robes of holiness, chanting the praises of God and his saints, and the blessed virgin, and exalting the cross now abased and trampled under foot. I feel a joyful assurance within me, that here, devout worshippers, with eyes cleared from their blind dis-

obedience, may once more bow down before that holy symbol, and worship it in spirit and in truth."

"Thou shalt have none other Gods but me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, or the likeness of anything in heaven or earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them."

These words were uttered by another intruding voice, but this time it was the sweet, childish, silvery tones of Francesca. Heedless of the strain of eloquence flowing from the lips of their reverend guest, her eyes had been accidentally attracted by the large, gold letters of the decalogue above her head, and she began cooing in a child-like manner these unseasonable sentences. The little girl was soon silenced by a reproving look from her sister, but the Priest, with a mild, excusing glance at the young offender, proceeded to say, as he turned for a further examination of the edifice:

"Perhaps I should have refrained from thus giving vent to the feelings with which this place irresistibly inspires me, hearing as I have done, that you and that young child have been imbued with tenets, with which my words would ill accord. But young lady," he continued, lowering his voice to an expressive whisper, and fixing his eyes sadly on her face, "it is difficult for me to realize to my mind, the, to me,—forgive me for so saying,—melancholy fact, that the children of her, who was to me knit in the closest bonds of spiritual relationship, whom I baptized a member of the Roman Catholic Church, have been led from its holy faith, into one which the testimony of Scripture, the Holy Fathers, and all the Martyred Saints of old have denounced as heretical —damnable—separated from the communion of Blessed spirits—and from the hope of Heaven."

Fra Paolo paused, and Giulia, overcome by

this solemn speech, and the awful look which accompanied it, trembled and turned pale. At this moment Mrs. Gordon joined the party, and the priest leaving the Baroness to ponder over his words, left her to meet the aunt.

CHAPTER X.

Resolved to sail the flood—to tread the fire
That's nought—to quench all natural compunction,
To know nor right nor wrong, nor crime nor virtue,
But as subservient to Rome's cause and Heaven's—
I have schooled my haughty soul to subtlest craft,
I've strung my tender heart to bloodiest havoc,
And stand prepared to wear the martyr's flames
Like nuptial robes; far worse, to drag to the stake,
My friend, the brother of my soul—if thus
I sear the Hydra's heads of heresy.

MILMAN.

Mrs. GORDON, during her long residence in Scotland, might unconsciously have imbibed rather a bearing towards the principles of simplicity and informality peculiar to its

church—but this feeling she in no way allowed to interfere with the duty she felt was incumbent on her—that of inculcating on her young nieces' minds, a dutiful allegiance to the established church of England; and it was her ardent desire to train them up as devout followers of its pure and evangelical doctrines.

With the religion of the young de Crespignys, it had been very much the same as with other points of their education; at least since their residence in England. Any occasional instruction Giulia might have gained, had been derived from a governess, not very well qualified for the task. This and her Sunday attendance in the chapel were the only religious advantages she had ever received, for the rest she was left to form her own spiritual character.

But we have already trespassed so much upon the reader's patience, pausing upon subjects of a nature which may be considered too grave for a novel, that we will no longer

tarry, but merely briefly say, that it was with heartfelt satisfaction Mrs. Gordon perceived her niece's character softening under the influence of the new and lovely view, which she endeavoured to present to her mind, of redeeming love and mercy opening before her; though it seemed a more difficult task to quicken long unawakened feelings of religion in Giulia's mind, than in that of her little sister, on whose young heart, no principles had yet been inculcated, save those of love to all created things.

In Giulia's thoughtful, serious mind, her aunt imagined she could perceive indications of a willingness, perhaps almost approaching to weakness, to be led by those who inspired her with confidence. Her seeming want of all self-esteem was also a characteristic peculiarly calculated for the reception of religious sentiments, which, when once received, would form the bias of her future character.

It may then be easily imagined how deeply

anxious Mrs. Gordon must have been upon the subject, how jealous over every impression---every effort, which might be likely to disturb the present improved state of the young girl's mind. It was not without many misgivings that she noticed the absorbed attention, with which Giulia listened to the conversation of the priest---and it soon became but too evident that his words impressed her with awe and admiration.

Truly subtle was the discourse of this wily Jesuit; for whilst every word that issued from his lips, tended to exalt the religion he professed, his words were veiled under a mask of humility---of toleration---which rendered it difficult either to refute or even to take umbrage at their open avowal.

The fears of Mrs. Gordon would have been more vividly awakened, had she been aware that Giulia that night sat up for hours after retiring to her apartment, perusing a

book she had found, amongst some curiously illumined missals and other presents Nice had received from her uncle.

In the book which had now fallen into her hands, the Baroness found doctrines supported by the most subtle arguments, to which Scripture was adapted, in a manner most startling to the young and unwary, by which the Protestant religion was debased, and Popery transformed into truth. On retiring to rest, her mind excited by what she had read, Giulia's dreams were full of the gifted and spiritual man, who had so strangely dropped down, as it were, from the skies amongst them, to break the dull monotony of their existence. She saw him in the visions of her sleep, standing, as he had done the previous day in the old chapel, like some inspired saint of old, predicting the restoration of a worship, whose solemn grandeur she had witnessed during her early childhood in the beautiful churches of

Italy. Their remembrance now came dimly back to her mind, like some dream of unearthly glory. The timid reserve the young girl displayed in the presence of Fra Paolo when next they met, was not caused so much by her usual feeling of inability to join with ease in conversation, and hopelessness of affording pleasure to others, as from the reverential awe of one, who, in the presence of a superior being, listens with breathless attention to every word that falls from his lips—who scarce knew whether it was pleasure or pain which caused her heart to beat so tumultuously when his words were condescendingly addressed to her, whilst those deep, searching eyes were fixed upon her face, as if they would penetrate into her inmost soul.

And then on the following Sunday, which was the third day from the priest's arrival, when she listened to the pure but unexciting language of our liturgy---read, it must be con-

fessed, not impressively by the voice of the fat chaplain—the service did appear to her, cold and wearisome, and during the excellent discourse, (for it was not his own), which followed, far from attempting to glean anything from what was delivered by that unmusical voice, it only sent her thoughts wandering to the delight of sitting in that same chapel, listening to the solemn strains of eloquent edification, emanating from the lips of the saintly Fra Paolo.

Our readers must remember that Giulia was but a girl of fifteen, possessing the phrenological developments of Veneration and Marvellousness to a great extent, combined however with no firmness—less of self-esteem, but a large organ of love of approbateness. Alas! it must be confessed, that to this feeling, might be traced the priest's chief attraction in her eyes, for had not the friendly Nice taken care to pour into the amazed ears

of the Baroness the most flattering communications, as to the favourable opinion with which she had impressed her reverend uncle, both with regard to her talents and the excellence of her disposition? the flattering unction applied with a dexterity shewing completely the clever knowledge the girl had acquired, of every vulnerable point of her friend's character, which did not fail to aid considerably, in exalting the great magician, whose art had, as it were, removed from her eyes the scales of conscious inferiority which had hitherto so painfully preyed upon her mind.

We all know well the weakness of human nature, how hard it is for the greatest, and noblest—even the most experienced in the sweets of its charmed cup, to resist the fascinations of flattery! and to the weak novice, what an intoxicating, what a bewildering drug does it become! Under the influence of its fascination evil may assume the garb of good—and good of evil.

Already Mrs. Gordon began to perceive some indications of a contrary power being set to work, to counteract the gentler, judicious sway she had gradually been acquiring over her niece's mind and affections.

There was a more careless consideration of her counsel and opinions, almost approaching at times to impatient disregard — reserve and unwillingness to converse with the confidence and openness she had before began to assume in her intercourse with her aunt— seeming to take less pleasure in her society, and evincing a suspicious tenacity, not now confined to all that regarded herself, but extending to every point connected with the priest and his niece. Mrs. Gordon began to feel alarmed, and could enter fully into Mrs. Rivers' meaning, when she expatiated on the serpent-like nature of a Roman Catholic priest, as she noted the strange influence which his presence seemed to have produced on the mind of the young Baroness.

As to religious impressions, the anxious aunt trusted that by her watchfulness she had prevented the possibility of any deleterious poison being infused into the young mind of her niece during the short period of Fra Paolo's stay at Shirley. She was too little an adept in the wiles of the evil one, to understand how speedily, and craftily, the designing can accomplish their purposes—she saw not the acute, delicate train of design, and well-adapted opportunities, ingeniously contrived to wind round the heart of the unwary Giulia. Yet the Jesuit never for one moment imagined, that it was not the straight path of duty that he was treading.

The business of his life was to extend the power and strength of the church to whose service he was bound, the accomplishment of this end being the point, not the means by which it was brought about. If the stake even had been requisite for the attainment of his

purpose, he would not have scrupled to grasp even at that violent method, of obtaining a proselyte; hence the simple manner, in which he was now carrying out his purpose, little troubled his conscience.

Mrs. Gordon had invited Dr. Manvers, the chaplain, to remain the Sunday after the service, and dine and sleep at the Hall. She trusted it was the last night of the Priest's stay, for she had lost no opportunity of making it apparent that this was her expectation. The events of the evening, however, were of a nature to cause her much regret, that she had, unfortunately, added another guest to the party.

After affording a strange contrast in outward spirituality and intellect to his Catholic rival, both in deportment and conversation, the Doctor, excited by the exhilarating effects of a good dinner—injudiciously, in the

presence of the girls, commenced a controversy on the superior merits of the Protestant religion over that of the Roman Catholic. This was the most favorable moment for Frn Paolo's triumph —Calmly, with all the ease and moderation of conscious superiority, the Priest met, and answered the arguments started by the chaplain in defence of Protestantism — but which, even had he possessed the ability, the good Doctor was not in a sufficiently clear state of mind, at that moment, to defend, with any strength of reasoning ; and when Mrs. Gordon, although she would fain have allowed the subject to drop, —yet indignant at the idea of allowing the enemy to carry very thing before him—interposed her gentle, but firm voice, bringing forward as the only sure testimony, the word of God—which no wisdom of man can gainsay—she felt herself bewildered into silence, by the consummate skill of her opponent.

She had not before imagined, that such an effect could have been produced by human power, as that which she now experienced. It seemed as if she were holding communion with Satan himself, robed as an angel of light; the transparent drapery of his thoughts, revealing his hideous mind, but baffling her endeavours to rend even the frail covering asunder. Such distortion of truth, such gilding of gross falsehood, she had never before encountered. What effect might it not then produce on the unsuspecting Giulia? Mrs. Gordon watched her, seated, breathlessly drinking in every word which fell from the lips of the crafty Jesuit. She saw the young girl occasionally turn her distended eyes upon herself, and then upon the chaplain, as if anxious to ascertain, whether they were able to gainsay any of the statements that were so forcibly started, and delivered with the boldness which generally characterizes truth.

As a strange and unfortunate contrast, before her sat the Protestant divine with open mouth and eyes, attempting every now and then some common-place remark, very little to the purpose. Giulia saw that her aunt looked pale and agitated. "What must be the impression that these words were making on her feelings?" was the thought which filled her mind, and Mrs. Gordon read perfectly what was passing within it.

She could endure it no longer; rising from her seat, in a tremulous, but determined voice, she said,

"Sir! however brilliant may be your powers of eloquence and argument, let me request you to spare us the pain of hearing it used, in support of statements which you know are considered contrary to the most sacred truths of Scripture. Giulia, it is time to retire to bed."

Giulia obeyed the summons, and, followed by Nice, left the library. The thin lips of the Priest moved with a smile of significance as his eyes followed them to the door, after both the girls had received his parting benediction. He conversed no more, but on indifferent subjects. On taking leave of Mrs. Gordon for the night, Fra Paolo made no mention of his intention of departing on the following morning. Uneasy and perplexed, Mrs. Gordon mentioned to the chaplain before retiring, her disinclination to be left any longer alone, to cope with the dangerous individual, whose invidious character gradually began to unfold itself. Doctor Manvers good-naturedly promised not to leave the Hall till the priest's departure had taken place ; and, as Mrs. Gordon had written to Mr. Hamilton the day after his arrival, his answer, she hoped, would contain instructions as to her future conduct.

With her mind filled with cares, Mrs. Gordon found herself alone in the solitude of her gloomy chamber. The sombre character of the mind diffuses a darker hue to every surrounding object; and never since her residence at the Hall had her spirit so yearned for the peaceful home she had left. Her little mountain dwelling! where every day was passed in the fulfilment of easy and pleasant duties — so unlike the stern, the heavy responsibilities which she had passively allowed to be laid upon her.

Much meditation, and many prayers were needed, to bring the disturbed mind of the excellent woman into its usual state of submissive calmness; but soon the resignation and firmness which she had never yet sought in vain, returned to her disturbed heart. She remembered her position as the sole remaining protectress of her orphan nieces, and she became herself again.

The whole household were apparently hushed

in the profound stillness of sleep, and the deep-toned stable clock had chimed the first hour of morning, when the stillness of night was interrupted by the sound of carriage wheels, followed by a subdued peal of the hall bell.

CHAPTER XII.

What, have you let the false enchanter 'scape?
O, ye mistook, ye should have snatched his wand,
And bound him fast. Comus.

Mrs. Gordon trusted this late arrival would prove no other than Mr. Hamilton—nor was she disappointed. In a short time, a stealthy footstep was heard approaching her door, which she had half opened to ascertain what was going forward. It was a servant sent to

announce that Mr. Hamilton was below, and, if possible, would wish to speak to her in the library.

Sending a message to say that she would immediately be with him, Mrs. Gordon commenced preparing for that purpose, and was soon passing through the silent house—the stillness of whose gloomy walls had scarcely been interrupted by the recent arrival ; so noiselessly had it been accomplished.

On entering the library, Mrs. Gordon found Mr. Hamilton standing with his back to the hastily re-kindled fire. He advanced to meet her with extended hands, saying—

“ My dear madam, nothing but business of grave importance, would have induced me thus to take the liberty of disturbing you at this unseasonable hour ; but I have something to communicate which will, no doubt, astonish you—namely, that in your Italian guest, we have strong suspicions you have been en-

tertaining, unawares, not an angel, but a very questionable personage ; one of whom, this gentleman and myself have come to rid you.

Mr. Hamilton whilst thus speaking, directed Mrs. Gordon's attention towards a stranger, who, in the large, dimly lighted apartment, she had not at first discerned.

" My dear sir," she exclaimed, " I am much relieved by your very timely arrival—for, I can assure you, I was beginning to be very anxious for such a riddance ; inasmuch, that I began to suspect that I had, unintentionally, admitted a wolf in sheep's clothing, according to Mrs. Rivers's sagacious prophecy."

Mr. Hamilton's eager enquiry into the meaning of this speech, was accompanied by an equally inquisitorial look from the other gentleman.

" I allude," Mrs. Gordon continued, " to the influence which Fra Paolo was evidently

striving to acquire over the mind of my niece, Lady De Crespigny; and which, with his great talents and seeming sanctity, would prove no difficult matter, were he suffered to remain much longer in her society."

"What! do you mean, madam," exclaimed the stranger, angrily, "that the Italian scoundrel has been endeavouring to draw the young lady into his plot?"

"No! my good friend," interposed Mr. Hamilton, smiling at the mystified expression of Mrs. Gordon's countenance; "But, is it possible," he continued, turning to the lady, "that this crafty knave has been attempting to stir up the Popish blood of our little Baroness, to add to his other offences? That would, indeed be the devil to pay—but he shall soon answer for all this."

Mr. Hamilton then proceeded to inform Mrs. Gordon, that before the receipt of her letter, a warrant had been issued for the arrest of a

party of Jesuits, who—having slipped into the country amongst the herds of emigrants who flocked at this time, to the only quiet spot in Europe — had been discovered to be the vehicle of secret communications held with foreign and inimical powers, besides creating much intestine confusion in their private endeavours to extend their religion ; one or two of these spies, however, could only be identified. The description given by Mrs. Gordon of the priest, in all but his name, agreed so completely with that of the person who had made himself the most notorious of the party, that Mr. Hamilton had lost no time in setting off, accompanied by a magistrate and officers —now in the house—in order to arrest the suspected person.

Mrs. Gordon was shocked at what she now heard ; it pained her kind heart to think that one whom she had received into the house, and upon whom she had exercised the rights of hospitality, should thus be taken, as it were

in a snare, under the roof which had afforded him shelter. She likewise felt that it was still more distressing, when Fra Paolo's near relationship to Nice was remembered—the girl who had so long formed one of their little party!

The magistrate, however, did not at all enter into her scruples—as well might a hound have been expected to feel any desire to spare the hare that he was hunting—and Mr. Hamilton fully entering into the prejudice, which was generally entertained against the whole race, seconded the wishes of his companion, that the officers of justice should repair immediately to the priest's sleeping apartment, and put him under arrest.

"My dear Mrs. Gordon, you cannot imagine the sage cunning of these Jesuits," he said, when Mrs. Gordon pleaded that Fra Paolo might be allowed, at least, to rest that night in peace, "You may be assured, he would soon scent us out," Mr. Hamilton continued, "and we should look rather silly in the morning if we awoke and found our bird flown."

Mrs. Gordon had once more retired to her room, only a very few minutes, when she was again disturbed by a knock at the door. It was Mr. Hamilton, who informed her, that the priest was not in his room, and they were therefore about to search the house.

"The poor girls will be surprised to hear all that has been going forward," he added, as he passed their rooms, in walking down the corridor accompanied by Mrs. Gordon, whose anxiety was now thoroughly excited, to ascertain the result of these unlooked for proceedings.

"I grieve for Nice," returned Mrs. Gordon, "to her this business must indeed be most painful."

"Yes, indeed, I wish we could manage to conceal the business from her altogether," continued the good natured Mr. Hamilton, "and not allow her to know the manner in which her uncle will have departed; although, from my knowledge of her character, I be-

lieve she is very sharp at finding out everything that is going on ; Claud always insisted upon it that she was a sly one. What's that ?" he exclaimed, as a slight rustling sound met their ears, as they stood in the gallery, of something moving in the opposite corridor.

Mr. Hamilton advanced to the door which led into it, and found that it was fastened from within ; stooping down, he placed his eye to the key-hole through which a light was perceptible, and immediately starting up, he said to Mrs. Gordon :—

" I saw either a ghost or a woman disappear through one of the doors."

Mrs. Gordon instantly thought it might be Nice, who had probably been holding a private conference with her uncle, in the late Lord de Crespigny's apartments, in which she knew they had passed together a considerable part of the preceding day, having retired there, as they said, for the performance of their religious duties. Mentioning her suspicions to

Mr. Hamilton, she proposed going into the Italian girl's room, to ascertain the fact, and did so, whilst he remained in the gallery.

Nice had lately occupied a small room through the Baroness's large, old fashioned apartment. Mrs. Gordon passed quickly through it, and found, as she expected, that no Nice was there. Hastily retracing her steps, she chanced, as she passed Giulia's bed, to glance her eyes upon it, and to her startled surprise, she saw that it was also empty; her niece was absent. In much dismay she rejoined Mr. Hamilton, and made known to him her discovery; both the girls she concluded must be in the room situated in the western corridor.

"This is abominable!" cried Mr. Hamilton, "what can they be about at this time of night? If I find Giulia with this devil of a priest,"—he concluded his speech with a violent blow with his foot against the door. The fastening, grown frail by age, gave way with little

difficulty, and, followed by Mrs. Gordon, the excited guardian proceeded hastily to the further apartment, and turned the lock, which, contrary to their expectations, did not resist his endeavours—Mr. Hamilton opened the door and entered. Mrs. Gordon carried a candle in her hand, without which they would have been in utter darkness, for any light that had before been there had been hastily extinguished.

The first object upon which their gaze rested, was the figure of the Italian girl; she was standing within a few paces of the door, towards which her eyes were fixed. They glared like those of a young tigress, from beneath the black masses of hair which hung about her face—Breathless, and panting she stood—but not from fear; fierce excitement seemed to be raging in her breast; it would have been difficult to identify the figure before the two astonished spectators, with the usually composed, subdued, and gentle Nice!"

Mr. Hamilton lifted up the light and looked beyond her. At the extremity of the large room, he perceived a figure leaning against a table—a strong contrast to her companion! pale, trembling, with a countenance covered with shame and confusion. It was indeed Giulia. The two young girls were the only occupants of the apartment—no priest was to be seen!

"Well young ladies, and pray what are you about here at this time of night?" enquired Mr. Hamilton fixing his eyes somewhat sternly on the Baroness. "This is a strange hour for you to be out of your beds; and pray, Signora Nice, what has become of your worthy uncle?"

The girl, who immediately on finding herself in the presence of Mr. Hamilton, dropped her eyes, and reassumed her air of humble composure, now raised them to his face, with a look of seeming astonishment at the question.

"He is not here, Signor," she murmured.

"Will you then be so obliging as to inform

me where he is, and what brought you here at this unseemly hour? And you also, Lady de Crespigny—perhaps you will favour me by a straightforward answer?"

Mr. Hamilton advanced towards his ward, who shrunk back, and cast down her eyes.

"Has the priest, Fra Paolo, or whatever he calls himself, been here with you?" he exclaimed, "pray what have you been doing with all this Popish mummetry?" and he glanced his eyes over the table near which Giulia stood. On it was placed a crucifix, a breviary, and rosary, all arranged beneath a picture, which on approaching, the light shone upon the beautiful copy of Leonardo de Vinci's Madonna and child. "Come young ladies, this will never do," the guardian exclaimed, as Giulia merely lifted her eyes with a frightened, bewildered expression towards Nice, as if to entreat her assistance to aid her in this dilemma.

"And if I do not hear the whole truth,"

continued Mr. Hamilton vehemently, "I declare to you that Nice shall leave the house to-morrow—never more to return."

Giulia burst into tears.

"My uncle has departed," murmured the Italian girl. "He took leave of us," she continued clearly, and without hesitation, in her half foreign accent, for Mr. Hamilton understood Italian imperfectly. "He did not tell us the reason of his sudden departure, but he intends, I believe, to go to Ireland immediately."

This was so innocently and naturally spoken, that all Mr. Hamilton could do, was to exchange a look with Mrs. Gordon, who gravely, but kindly, had approached her niece, whose agitation had become excessive ; she was trembling and weeping almost hysterically.

Mrs. Gordon had taken her hand to lead her away, and Mr. Hamilton was about to leave the room to report to the officials the informa-

tion he had received, when the magistrate and his myrmidons appeared at the door.

With curiosity and surprise visible on their countenances, they surveyed the scene before them. The large, almost unfurnished room, with the one dim light all concentrated on the altar like table at its extremity—the little group around it, amongst which the dark Italian girl was the most conspicuous object—she looked almost beautiful, as she turned her eyes suspiciously, nay even fiercely upon them. Giulia was led away by her Aunt, but Nice had to undergo some further examination. She seemed distressed at the mysterious questions of the magistrate, but told all that she chose to relate with *naiveté* and clearness. But as her uncle's departure was certainly attended with suspicious circumstances, and indeed appeared scarcely possible, they determined again to search every nook and corner of the old house, and if they failed in discovering the

priest, it was then resolved that they should set off and endeavour to track his steps.

And this course they ultimately pursued, for no trace of Fra Paolo was to be found in any part of the house. Nor indeed were his pursuers more successful afterwards, in their efforts to secure him, although every attempt was made at all the seaports to detect the fugitive. However, the measures taken by the Government were not without their beneficial effects, for the result was, stopping short the machinations of the Jesuit party, and the affair was allowed to die quietly away.

Mr. Hamilton remained the next day at the hall, and great was the joy of the unconscious Francesca, when informed, on her awaking in the morning, of his arrival. She did not trouble herself to solve the mystery of this unexpected happiness, and was only vehement in her expressions of gratification, on finding that her dear, merry guardian had appeared so suddenly, in the place of the tall,

black priest, who she never could endure; and indeed the little girl hated even to be in the same room with him, or to meet his tall figure on the stairs—his eyes would glare on her so frightfully! and she heard, she told her aunt, that he wished to make them all bow down to idols—at least, so Mrs. Rivers and nurse told her.

Mr. Hamilton questioned the child, in order to discover whether the priest had ever made an attempt to crush the tender germs of pure religion in her young mind, by the pernicious intervention of his deteriorating doctrines, but he soon found that even if the trial had been made, it had produced no more success, than if the attempt had been to entice the restless butterfly as it flitted from flower to flower, to settle on the hand that would fain have grasped it.

“In vain is the snare set in the sight of any bird.”

The priest had failed by the circumstance

of the perfect innocence of the child. It was evident from the several relations which they gleaned from Francesca, that much injury might have been inflicted upon the mind of Giulia, but the violent state of nervous excitement into which the events of the preceding night had thrown her, was a still more convincing proof, how greatly her mind had been agitated. Mrs. Gordon therefore requested Mr. Hamilton not to harass her with any questions at that moment, but to leave the young girl to be soothed by gentle endeavours, and when calm had succeeded to the present agitated state which the late events had produced, every effort should be used, to eradicate the evil seeds, which had evidently been strewn in her mind.

Mr. Hamilton, on departing, had been persuaded into remaining satisfied with the mild course, of only, in most emphatic terms, enjoining Nice under pain of instant dismissal from the hall, ever presuming to broach the subject

of religion to the Baroness or her sister. He even went so far as solemnly to declare, that any demonstration on his niece's part, of the slightest inclination towards the Roman Catholic religion, would be visited on Nice's head, by immediate removal from the friends of her infancy—so he cautioned her to beware.

A difficult task indeed was that destined to be the part of the young Italian girl ! On every side the hideous gates of a convent seemed yawning to receive her—this bug-bear, which had haunted her imagination from her earliest childhood, the grave truly of her youthful aspirations !

The words of her uncle rang in her ears. They were such as prompted her to take a course widely at variance with the commands of Mr. Hamilton. She must serve her church without the dreadful sacrifice of laying down her liberty at its feet.

The spirit of most girls of fifteen would have utterly sunk under this fearful dilemma.

Not so was it with Nice ! The startling position only roused her to exert with renewed energy, the talents for intrigue which she was well aware she so amply possessed, and which could alone carry her safely through the difficult task of dissimulation—now, the only road, by which she could attain the end so ardently desired, by a heart, which was ambitious, as it was ill directed.

CHAPTER XIL

"The man
Who in this spirit communes with the Forms
Of Nature—who with understanding heart
Doth know and love such objects as excite
No morbid passions—no disquietude,
No vengeance, and no hatred, needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of love."

WORDSWO

IT was sometime before Giulia recovered the effects of the exciting visit and the serious circumstances attending the departure of the priest. The bewildering manner which he had, as it were, vanished from

sight filled her with a degree of dismay which had in it a kind of almost superstitious fear, evidently affecting her nervous system. She became timid—shrinking from the idea of being left alone, and constantly avoiding even a near approach, if possible, of the apartment which had been before, her most favourite retreat.

Mrs. Gordon strove rather to efface from her niece's mind every impression relating to the late events, than to bring them more vividly before her imagination, by endeavouring to draw from the nervous girl, the relation of the circumstances which still remained a mystery; but our readers need not suffer from the good lady's caution; they must, therefore, be informed, that on the Sunday night in question, when all was hushed in the house, Giulia, her feelings excited by the insinuating address of the wily Jesuit, had willingly yielded herself to Nice's guidance, and accompanied her in the nocturnal

visit which she was accustomed to pay to the priest. In her mother's apartments, the young Baroness found him fully prepared to carry on his machinations—there with every outward demonstration well arranged to assist his purpose upon a weak and vacillating mind—the solemn hour—the dimly illumined apartment, the sole light falling on the heavenly countenance of the Madonna and her holy child! Assisted by these powerful auxiliaries, he had prayed and talked, reasoned and exhorted, till, at length, his deep-toned voice, his imposing mien, his mighty eloquence, wound up the girl's imagination to such a pitch, that she was kneeling with Nice, before the picture and crucifix, with all the awe and devotion of a Roman Catholic; whilst the priest calling upon the departed spirits of her parents, bade her believe that they were hovering around her, and commanding their orphan child—now, for the first time, really joined to them by the true communion of

Saints, and placed under the guardianship and love of the Blessed Virgin, who so sweetly smiled upon her in answer to her prayer.

The priest then proceeded to tell the bewildered girl, that he must shortly leave her, but that his spirit would be with her, and would watch over her eternal interest, of which he should never lose sight; exhorting her in the most solemn and awful terms, to hold fast, even though it should be for the time being, in secret, the faith in which she had been baptized, and in the belief of which she could alone hope for happiness, here or hereafter. The priest then desired Nice to leave him alone with the Baroness, in order that the terrified girl might, as a seal of her conversion, perform the sacrament of confession.

Scarcely had the door closed upon the Italian girl, when she hastily re-entered and informed her uncle, in a whisper, that she heard

voices in the gallery, and that one of them was that of Mr. Hamilton.

A brief conversation, in whispering accents, was continued between the uncle and Nice for a few seconds ; and then Fra Paolo, approaching Giulia, said in an emphatic manner, and with a voice, sternly impressive, which haunted her memory for many a day.

“Ere long we shall meet again ; till then forget not what you have professed before God and the saints. Farewell !”

The light was suddenly extinguished, and she heard no other sound, save that of a slight rustling in the apartment, till the entrance of Mr. Hamilton and her aunt ; when she perceived, though too bewildered and frightened to enter fully at that moment into the mystery of his strange and sudden disappearance, that the priest had vanished.

But we will no longer detain our readers, by entering into any minute detail of the effect

these circumstances were calculated to produce on a young mind of fifteen, or on all the anxious cares, by which Mrs. Gordon strove to counteract the evil effects of the interference of the crafty Priest.

Nothing contributed so much to this end, as the diversion of thought and interest created by a short tour into Derbyshire, which was taken by Mrs. Gordon and her eldest niece, on the arrival of spring. They were unaccompanied by either Nice or Francesca, who were left under the charge of a lady, whom she had at length consented should be sent to relieve her of some part of the weight of responsibility, incurred by the charge which she had undertaken.

In this temporary separation of Giulia and Nice, Mrs. Gordon fully discovered, how extraordinary was the influence the Italian girl had contrived to acquire over the young Baroness, for Giulia was again an altered being, ready to be moulded to any form, open

both to reason and affection. Her heart seemed to be softened and enlightened by the contemplation of the beauties of nature, and a more intimate acquaintance with the charms of mind which she could not fail to discover in her gentle and intellectual companion. For the first time, since her acquaintance with her aunt had commenced, she could judge of her merits, unbiassed by the deteriorating remarks of the bosom friend, who seemed to have taken upon herself the office of directing her tastes and opinions, and thus counteracted every plan and every advance which Mrs. Gordon made with a view to the improvement of her niece.

Mrs. Gordon avoided all reminiscences of the past—she endeavoured to infuse new hopes, new views for the future. Youth still is youth, as spring must ever be spring, with its budding flowers and tender greens, ready to shoot forth at the first genial ray of sunshine, though the sky may sometimes be as dark as winter—and winds as bleak—and frosts as cut-

such lovely feelings; or was it that again there was one, who glided by her side, seemingly harmless, and innoxious—one of those serpents of social life, who—

“Sting the soul, until its healthful frame,
Is changed to secret festering—sore disease!”

CHAPTER XIII.

"Beauty is but a vain and doubtful good,
A shining gloss, that fadeth suddenly ;
A flower that dies, when first it 'gins to bud
A brittle glass, that's broken presently ;
A doubtful good, a gloss, a glass, a flower,
Lost, faded, broken, dead within an hour."

SHAKSPEARE'S POEMS.

EVER since the year 1810 to the present period,
there have been many changes in the so called
world—

"The world where men and women meet."

the world of fashion!—Circumstances, or the

fickle tastes of society may have marked alterations in its arbitrary laws, and instead for better and for worse, are visible, according to the different opinions of individuals so it will ever be; what appears to us as sent perfect, will in its turn pass away next race, whilst they shove us off the will introduce new discoveries and innovations—as one wave effaces the ridge which former had made on the sand by the sea-shore so every succeeding age obliterates the opinions and modes of the age which had gone before it. Truly *the fashion of the world* is passing away.

Those whose prime of life has been passed in a former epoch, may, perchance, sigh for the good old times of kings, country dances, waistcoats, and post horses, whilst those who flourish in the present moment, laud the stars, for having lived their day in the time of a fair young Queen, and that of the Railroads and Rail-roads.

Both may be equally right in their estimate of the several superiorities of the two periods. But one point is certain ; though the fashion of the day may be altered, the world remains intrinsically the same — still exerting the same arbitrary influence over those who yield to its sway—even whilst the deceived victims are cherishing the idea, that the world is a servant, to order as they please.

Yes—it is a sad truth—but so it ever is, that the deteriorating effect of contact with the world, soon makes itself visible.—the worldly mind creeping into the place of that, which may, perchance, have been, ere then, bright, free, and innocent, comparatively speaking.

Woe to the warm, fresh heart, carried into the chilling atmosphere of fashion ! Oh ! you, who are forced to enter within its precincts, beware ! Suffer not your heart also to be thus beguiled—rather keep it without in

some greener spot, where love and natural affection exists—or safer still with Him who says, “Give me your heart,” and in whose custody alone is safety. There only, may you hope to guard it secure from evil. The world is no such faithful guardian; if ever you wish to regain your heart, after having once become its votary, you will find it, at best, tarnished, hardened, perhaps crushed and broken, or with a dart fixed in it, which you will scarcely ever have power to extract.

And sad it is to see that those whom the world most loves to make its own, are often-times possessed of such attractive attributes —making even worldlings appear lovely in the eyes of the inexperienced. For instance, take a female character full of liveliness of intellect, strength and warmth of feeling, calculated to form a perfect wife and mother. She enters the world, the monster breathes its spirit over it all, and a total

change ensues; the outward beauty may appear more beautiful still from the polish it has received, but every energy of soul and body is devoted to the service of Mammon—a service which is incompatible with any other.

Mrs. Hamilton, the wife of the guardian of the young De Crespignys, was truly one of the fairest specimens of a worldly woman. At the age of forty, she was as gay and captivating, and almost as lovely, as when her husband first introduced her to a London life some twenty years before—still as devoted a wife to that idolizing, proud husband—an affectionate mother to her children—even as warm and cordial a friend, to the friends of her earlier years—when they came in her way!—it required some time and experience to discover the melancholy fact, that the canker worm of worldliness had gained ingress to her heart, and that those who sought her, must be content with receiving her winning smile

and graceful expressions of interest and affection ; and perhaps that is more, bye-the-bye, than the worldly often trouble themselves to bestow, on those from whom they have nothing to gain in return.

Mrs. Hamilton's life had been a happy one, as free from care and annoyance as a most amiable and idolizing husband could make it. A younger son, with but a moderate fortune, he had given up, for the sake of his family, the more congenial, though less profitable life of an independant country gentleman to reside in London, having accepted a lucrative situation under Government, thereby throwing his wife into that sphere of life, in which she formed so bright an ornament ; and thus they paved the way for the future introduction of their children.

The eldest of the party has already been introduced to the reader. Two daughters—one who had already made her appearance in the gay world, the other about to be launched

—a boy at Sandhurst—and four younger children, completed the list of young Hamiltons.

At the period to which we now allude, the Hamiltons had just removed from the house which they had inhabited for many years, to one more capacious in Portman Square, which in the year 1810, was considered one of the most fashionable of situations. Many other changes and additions were made in their *ménage*, all easily explained by the announcement in the papers that amongst the fair *debutantes* of the approaching season, the young Baroness de Crespiigny was about to appear, under the chaperonage of the amiable lady of her guardian, the Honorable Mrs. George Hamilton.

Most fashionable women, with grown up daughters of their own, would not greatly have relished the idea, of having a supernumerary young lady added to their train, and Mrs.

Hamilton was not one to whom the infliction would have been lightly felt; but in the present instance, there were many extenuating circumstances, which made it appear anything but objectionable in her eyes. In the first place it was her husband's will, and she had prepared her mind to expect this event, ever since Mr. Hamilton had entered upon his guardianship; for Mrs. Gordon had, on taking the charge of her nieces, given it to be understood, that she declined that part of the undertaking, which would oblige her again to enter the world of gaiety. And then, low & it spoken—for, to herself even, Mrs. Hamilton would not have acknowledged the vulgar feeling—there might be something in the rank & this addition to their party, which recompensed her for the drawbacks incidental to the business. The case perhaps would have been different had her husband's ward been a *plain* Miss, instead of a *plain* Baroness! With

superiority of beauty to eclipse the charms of her own fair daughter, who was to be presented at the same time, Mrs. Hamilton could look forward with patient resignation to the arrival of a care, which, however, brought with it the compensation of a new house—a new equipage and an opera box.

The brilliant establishment of her daughters, was the paramount anxiety of her active and sanguine mind—not that Mrs. Hamilton had as yet become a regular match making chaperone. She was still so much admired—so much sought after on her own account. She *felt* so young; her spirits were so light and buoyant, that when her eldest daughter Annie came out, the mother and daughter were more towards each other as two sisters; and Annie, though sufficiently attractive to have afforded a subject for matrimonial speculations to a manœuvring mother, was left in peace; and when the first season was concluded, without

one offer having been made, she only received a good-natured banter from Mrs. Hamilton at the little success she had met with.

"My dear child," the beautiful mother laughingly added, "before I was eighteen, I had refused four offers."

"Oh, mama, that is *quite* a different affair," Annie energetically answered.

"Why, Annie? I am sure you are much better looking than I was—and you have twice as much really in you—you are much more accomplished and sensible."

"What does that signify, mama—who cares for what is in the mind—it is only the exterior the world cares for."

Mrs. Hamilton laughed much at the experience her young daughter had gleaned, even in one brief season in London.

"Well, dear Annie, we must really exert ourselves next year. I must have you married before Gertrude's time is come. I should ex-

pire if I had two daughters out at the same time—particularly as I shall have that ugly little Baroness to chaperone as well."

"What can I do, mama?"

"I will tell you, Annie—you must laugh more. I did a great deal by my laugh."

"Yes, but what a laugh it is," exclaimed Annie. "I will tell you a secret, mama; you will never marry me, whilst you are so pretty and agreeable—no one ever thinks of looking or speaking to me whilst you are present."

"Thank you, darling, for the compliment, but it is anything but a pleasing one, however. I can assure you I would rather have the small-pox, and lose every vestige of good looks—become half stupified—or any other horror, than that my daughters should be old maids."

Poor Annie looked serious, and began, for the first time, to consider what she could do to avert what her mother seemed to consider

so very grievous an evil—and the then unworldly and simple girl might soon have become a true disciple of her worldly mother, had it not been for a startling dispensation, sent doubtless in mercy, to save her from the heartless career of a life of vanity. Mrs. Hamilton's idly spoken words seemed to have been visited upon her.

Early in the ensuing season, at the commencement of all the London gaiety—when poor Annie's heart was beating high with the secret hope, that there was a prospect of her mother's desire being realized, and in a manner which fulfilled every hope of her young mind—for the only one, whom she had ever seen, who she felt she should love, had spoken to her at the last ball, words which were scarcely to be mistaken—the small-pox shewed itself in the house, one of the female servants being attacked with the disease. The sufferer was instantly removed, on the nature of the malady

becoming apparent, and every precaution was taken against infection.

One morning Annie was missing. She had left the house, and had gone to the lodgings where the sick maid had been taken. She too was sickening for the small-pox, and knowing her mother's horror and dread of it, she left a message imploring that no one would approach her, save the nurse who was already in attendance.

Mrs. Hamilton was dismayed indeed, but Annie soon beheld her by her side, and in spite of all the entreaties of the poor girl that she would leave her, the mother never quitted her post. Her Annie, she exclaimed, should have no other nurse. Tenderly and devotedly did she tend her child through a long and dangerous attack of that most loathsome disease. And it was from no expressions of regret from her mother, that Annie Hamilton was made aware that she had lost, through its

ravages, the beauty on which she knew that mother had placed so high a value.

A looking glass at last revealed the fact, and she beheld with a sharp pang, and a faintness at her heart, her swollen and disfigured features—her altered countenance! How bitter were the feelings of poor Annie, none ever knew, but He who sent the stroke, which deprived her of the gift which had been, for a brief space, bestowed upon her—for none ever heard a murmur, or a fractious word, at a dispensation so calculated to sour the temper—and which might have been supposed to be doubly trying, to a girl brought up to consider beauty, almost the chief requisite of a woman.

“Poor mama! how distressed she must be! And Claud, what will he say when he finds his favourite sister such a fright,” was all that she was heard to utter, and assuredly, this sad event was looked upon by every member of the family, in the light of a deep affliction—

but the poor sufferer was more than ever endeared to them all—and each separately endeavoured to vie with each other, in demonstrations of affection towards her who bore with such patience what they considered so direful a misfortune.

He who reads the secrets of every heart could alone discern the inward struggle of the young girl, to triumph over the natural weakness of human nature—for though she could say with a placid smile,

“Really, it is quite delightful to have become ugly, you all make so much of me!” yet, was it possible that she could bear without a bitter pang, the cold looks of surprise and pity, her totally altered appearance excited?—the neglect she now experienced from those who were once full of *empressement* to win from her a smile?—And more cruel than any other mortification to note the air of dismay — almost of disgust, with which *he* now regarded her — he, who at their last

meeting, had gazed with such ardent admiration on her face. Truly, higher feelings supported her through all this fearful ordeal, than mere amiability of character ; the plant of Heavenly mindedness must have taken root in her mind, even in the midst of the chilling atmosphere of a worldly education.

And the mother — what were her feelings on this occasion ? At first, natural joy at the recovery of a much loved child from the gates of death, absorbed every other consideration ; but when the certainty of Annie's recovery gave Mrs. Hamilton leisure to turn her thoughts to other subjects, the disfigurement of her beautiful child had been a severe blow to the worldly pride and ambition of the mother's heart. It was, perhaps, the frustration of all her hopes in that quarter, that caused her to concentrate them, with greater eagerness, on the next daughter she was about to present to the world.

Gertrude Hamilton was generally considered, in the family, as the beauty; and in the value of this beauty, the pride and confidence of the mother was in no way diminished, by the emphatic warning which ought to have taught her to remember how frail and perishable is its nature—how, “in the morning it may be green and growing up, in the evening, cut down and withered.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Why are you grave, lady? Why do you frown?
Here dwell no frowns nor anger; from those gates
Sorrow flies far—see, here be all the pleasures
That fancy can beget on youthful thoughts,
When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns
Brisk as the April buds in primrose season.

Comus.

NONE of the family, with the exception of Mr. Hamilton and his eldest son, had ever beheld the young Baroness; it was, therefore, with no inconsiderable degree of curiosity, that they

looked forward to her arrival. From what they had heard of Giulia, the Hamiltons were, certainly, not prepossessed in favor, either of her personal attractions, or the amiability of her disposition ; although, at the same time, there was a certain degree of interest imparted to her, from the circumstances which surrounded her, particularly heightened in the minds of the young people by the romantic story of the priest, in which she had played so conspicuous a part. In short, they were prepared to meet her with more favor than if they had expected her to be a common-place, agreeable, good-looking girl.

Mrs. Gordon was to accompany her niece to London, and remain just long enough to leave her little at home in her novel position amongst her new friends. The day arrived ; and in the bright light of an April evening, the dusty travelling carriage stopped at the house in Portman Square, and from it, soon issued in

her travelling costume—looking sick, weary, and wretched—the fair *debutante* the London world was expecting, and a more hopeless, unwilling candidate, never perhaps before stepped upon the stage of gay life.

Mr. Hamilton was at the door to receive them with a kind, cheerful welcome, and led poor Giulia, dizzy and bewildered, up-stairs into the light, gay drawing-room, where she was met by a being, so bright and young looking, attired in a splendid evening dress, that at first, she thought she must be one of the Miss Hamiltons, but was soon presented to her as the wife of her guardian.

Giulia was greeted by the beautiful woman with kind smiles, but at the same time, with a searching look of scrutiny, surveying her guest from head to foot, which added no little to the discomfiture of the nervous girl—but Mr. Hamilton soon came to her assistance, exclaiming,

"Come, Anne, you must introduce Lady de Crespigny to her young friends, and apologize to Mrs. Gordon for running away from her so soon—but we have received the Prince's command to dine with him, and I regret to say the carriage is already at the door."

Giulia's attention was then directed towards a group of young Hamiltons; becoming for the first time aware that she was all this time, undergoing the scrutiny of six more pairs of eyes.

But on being thus called upon, the two elder girls stepped forward, and one with gentle warmth took her hand and smiled upon her. It was almost a relief to Giulia's eyes, to see that it was a plain, but amiable looking face, from which that smile proceeded; for she had been quite dazzled by the blaze of rosy cheeks, and golden ringlets of the collected group of true specimens of English children which had

met her eye ; particularly striking to one accustomed only to the completely different style of the Italian girl, and her own fair-haired sister.

" But this must be your particular star," exclaimed Mr. Hamilton, as he brought forward Gertrude, " for you are both to set on your campaign together ; so beware ! not rival stars!"

A merry ringing laugh from Mrs. Hamilton chimed in after this speech, as she glared from one to the other of the two young *débutantes*, with an air of evident satisfaction at the comparison—though certainly not a fair one, afforded by her well dressed, beauteous Gertrude, who probably, with the same agreeable consciousness of superiority curling her rosy lip, shook hands with the pale, dark-faced girl who was suffering under all the disadvantage attendant on the appearance on an air from a long journey, into the midst of strange

an event which her hitherto sequestered life rendered so totally novel.

Gertrude Hamilton's manners, however, were not by any means as prepossessing as those of her sister—there was a careless coldness about them, very unlike the kind suavity of Annie's demeanour, and that of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton; and Giulia turned away with feelings at her heart not very promising to the friendship which it was proposed should be formed between the two contemporaries.

On Mrs. Hamilton's again addressing her, the young girl lifted her eyes from the ground on which they had been bent, and in so doing her gaze was suddenly riveted on the fair, open face of a boy, between three and four, who with his large, blue, smiling eyes, turned upwards towards her, now stood holding his mother's satin robe. A change came over the countenance of the Baroness—the crimson colour first mounted to her very brow, and

then answering in some incoherent words the question of Mrs. Hamilton, she stepped hastily forward, knelt down beside the boy, and kissed him—but none, save the child, saw that tears were suffusing her eyes. All, especially the mother, were gratified at this notice of the little pet of the family; it was unexpected from one of so ungracious a demeanour. They would have been somewhat surprised could they have seen the spring of sentiment which the countenance of little Georgie had caused to gush forth, and which had impelled the action.

“ Is not that little fellow very like your brother Claud ?” enquired Mrs. Gordon of his sisters, the same evening at dessert, as Georgie stood by Giulia’s chair, she silently supplying him with almonds and raisins from her plate. “ Does he not remind you extremely of your friend Mr. Claud Hamilton, Giulia ?” she continued, suddenly turning towards her niece, and she beheld the face and neck of Giulia

suffused with a deep crimson, as she murmured—"Yes—no—do you think so?—I almost forget," and she bent her head over the child, to hide the confusion from which from some cause or another she evidently suffered.

This speech seemed to mystify the Miss Hamiltons, and a sly thought certainly glanced across their minds, that perhaps the attractions of their handsome brother, had made some impression on the apparently unexcitable heart of their visiter, although two years and a half had passed since they last met.

However it might be, certainly Georgie, from their first meeting, seemed to have created a deeper share of the young Baroness's interest and notice, than, Mrs. Gordon told them she had ever seen any other so gratuitously acquire; and nothing seemed to give her so much gratification as when the little boy, won as children ever are by attention and kindness, began to appreciate her affection, by seeking her society and returning her caresses.

Mrs. Gordon was pleased that Giulia had discovered any point of attraction on which she could fix her affections; for indeed she felt the time approaching, which she had determined upon for her return to Shirley, without the comfort of seeing that her niece had gained much ground in intimacy with the other branches of the family.

Mr. Hamilton was almost always occupied with public business, and even with him, though an old acquaintance, she had never been able to feel much at her ease, notwithstanding his extreme indulgence and cheerfulness, which made him so general a favourite with young people. Mr. Hamilton had been accustomed to look forward to the society of his own children, as a relaxation from the cares of his busy life; therefore he always expected to be at those times enlivened by their sprightliness and their cordial enjoyment of his presence. In this same manner Francesca had won his love and admiration. It was the

knowledge of this, and of her own conscious inability to please, owning inwardly with bitter feelings her own inferiority, that poor Giulia felt even more than ever constrained and awkward in his presence. She ever imagined when he spoke of Francesca, descended upon her beauty—her vivacity—that he was making comparisons between them, and would have given worlds to exchange places with her.

As for Mrs. Hamilton, although all graceful blandness, and even affection towards Giulia, her brilliancy and vivacity were too bright for her. The evident manner in which she appreciated personal attractions, her keen, quick observation, and witty satire, frightened and deprived her of everything approaching to a feeling of ease.

Towards Annie and Gertrude, Giulia's behaviour was repulsive in the extreme--she seemed to shun and receive with evidently jealous caution and shyness, any advance towards intimacy and friendship, which with the

frankness natural to youth, even Gertrude endeavoured to establish between them. Soon, however, offended by the coldness with which her attentions were received, the spoilt young beauty declared, she would trouble herself no further about her.

Perhaps Gertrude might have been somewhat more indulgent, and have admitted some excuse for the ungracious manner in which her advances were received, if she had known the real cause which influenced Giulia's cold manner, that the poor girl existed under the power of a spell—for such a term might truly have been applied to the power which the Italian girl, Nice, had acquired over the infatuated Giulia; and that whenever her heart was beginning to soften under the genial ray of kindness which poured upon her, a pair of glittering black eyes, seemed in imagination to gleam reproachfully, as if upbraiding her for having broken the solemn engagement. In

the sombre library at Shirley Hall, the night before Lady de Crespigny's departure, in the gloom of twilight, and amid the tears and sighs of a parting interview, Nice had drawn from her a solemn promise, that neither the flattering smiles—the allurements of the world, or designing friends, should induce her to suffer any other to gain a place in her heart, or to usurp in any way her office of confidante and friend; she, who was her own Nice—the friend of her early youth—her faithful and attached Nice—her bosom friend! and had it been an absent lover, or husband, whose jealousy she feared to create, the young girl could not have watched with more nervous guardedness over every outward demonstration of seeming inconstancy to this vow—appearing to dread lest the very wind that blew, might carry to the ear of Nice, that another had in any degree created an interest in her heart. Well did Giulia re-

member the glance those dark orbs could assume—those looks of fiery fierceness and reproach!

It was not without a struggle to prevent it, that this separation had taken place. Prompted by Nice's commands, Giulia had, a short time previous to her departure for Town, requested Mrs. Gordon to make her desire known to her guardian, that the Italian girl might be permitted to be with her during her sojourn in London.

Mrs. Gordon whilst she acceded to this request, at the same time in no way forwarded its being complied with. She thought—although in a selfish point of view, she would have preferred infinitely being left alone with her little Francesca—that the Baroness would be much better without her friend. The Hamiltons also seemed to consider this addition to their party on no account desirable. The proposal was in consequence declined.

It had been a promise to the late Lady de Crespigny, that Nice should be suffered to remain in the family till claimed by her uncle; and as that uncle seemed at present in no haste so to do, never having, to the knowledge of any one, held any intercourse with his niece, since his strange departure two years before, in the family she must still remain, and under the circumstances of her case, the quiet seclusion of Shirley Hall must be more suitable and proper for her, than the life into which she would be unavoidably introduced in London.

This plea was urged to the Baroness, for the reason of the refusal to her request—and with it the friends were forced to be content. Lady de Crespigny would not always be under the dominion of others, was the bright prospect to which they looked for consolation. The day would arrive when she should be of age.

"And then, dear Nice," Giulia added,

" wherever I go, you shall also go; none shall separate us *then*."

" Then!" was the inward reply of the Italian girl, as she turned away to conceal a scornful curl of the lip, and flash of her dark eyes, " and do you think, dull, passionless drone, that for three long years, whilst you crawl sullenly and apathetically through a world in which you dream perchance of one whom you can never attain, I shall calmly submit to a living death, a foretaste of the convent to which this submission may lead me—yes truly, a living death within these gloomy walls, my heart—my talents feeding upon themselves—existing in obedient subservience to a methodistical woman, and exposed to the caprices of a spoilt and tiresome child! No, poor, weak tool—you must be the instrument of my aggrandizement. My beauty and talents were not bestowed upon me to be wasted here—you must not thus escape from my grasp, or

you perhaps will be lost to me, by the very next breath of flattery which blows upon you. In some way or another I must follow you ere long—you must not learn to live without me, for as yet I cannot act without you.

CHAPTER XV.

“ Say, why are beauties praised and honored most,
The wise man’s passion, and the vain man’s toast?
Why deck’d with all that land and sea afford?
Why angels call’d—and angel like adored?”

POPE.

MRS. GORDON remained to see her niece fairly launched upon the world, and then most gladly escaped from the whirl of a London life to the sober stillness of Shirley Hall—its outward aspect gladdened by the beauties of spring, as was its interior by the innocent

mirth of the little fairy-like being who flew so gladly to meet her on her return.

But it was with no small degree of interest and anxiety that Mrs. Gordon had parted with her eldest niece. The day before her departure Giulia had been presented at Court. With a degree of anxiety scarcely less tender than that with which Mrs. Hamilton contemplated the effect produced upon her sylph like Gertrude in her sweeping train and nodding plumes, did Mrs. Gordon gaze upon the young Baroness; but her solicitude arose from a different cause. She thought not so much of what the world would think of her, as of what would be her impression of the world. The aunt noted the cheek of the young girl flush—her lip tremble—her eye brighten—when after a timid glance at the mirror which reflected her form, she saw probably with some surprise, the magic power of dress, and heard the usual whispered comments of those who superintended her toilette.

"How well Lady de Crespigny looks! How becoming are the white plumes in her dark hair! No one ever became a court dress better."

Her heart beat with still greater delight, when she noted the unfeigned satisfaction which Mrs. Hamilton expressed at her appearance; given even with more cordiality when she turned her eyes on her own fair debutante, as she entered the room in all the consciousness of beauty; the stately dress affording so pleasing a contrast to her sylph like form, and looking with all the superior advantage which a blonde possesses by daylight over a brunette.

Mrs. Gordon, whose observant eyes were ever upon her niece, immediately noted, as Gertrude now became the object of universal admiration, the countenance of the Baroness changed, and she turned with a quick, nervous movement from the beautiful girl to the reflection

of her own form in the large cheval glass which stood before her.

"And what will it be when she enters the fashionable world?" mused Mrs. Gordon. "What bitterness and mortification have even the most favoured by nature to expect to meet with there, and with her jealous feelings, how will she brook slights, engendered by the superior attractions of others?"

Mrs. Gordon's long separation from society made her forget that there are other qualifications which the world considers far more attractive, than the most perfect loveliness either of mind or person. With much anxiety she awaited Lady de Crespigny's return from St. James's, dreading lest this first specimen of what she had to encounter, in the life into which she had just entered, might have disagreeably impressed her — she did return—and with amazement her aunt regarded her. The very step—the tone of voice —the countenance of the young Baroness,

seemed to have undergone a complete change—whilst, in the demeanour of the fair Gertrude, there was evidently a less degree of confident satisfaction—less appearance of triumphant superiority.

The truth is, that lovely as she was, she was but one of the many beauties who had, that day, graced our English Court—so famed for the loveliness of its women—whereas, in her own family, Gertrude had been taught to consider her charms pre-eminent; she had seen them outshone—or equalled by many—and, although occasionally she might have detected a glance directed towards her, and heard an inquiry as to who she was, yet alas the careless answer, “Oh! a Miss Hamilton!” or, “I really do not know,” was not calculated to satisfy a little heart beating high with the expectation of admiration and conscious beauty.

But there had been but one peeress, in her own right, presented that day!

Many a glance of curiosity, of interest, rested upon the young Baroness De Crespigny. Frequent murmurs of her name floated upon her ear; and then, how many a high and noble of the land, pressed forward to request an introduction—as leaning on Mrs. Hamilton's arm, trembling, from the mingled feelings excited in her breast by the novel situation into which she found herself so suddenly transported—one, that seemed to her delighted mind, the realization of the wildest dreams of romance in which she had ever indulged, she passed from the presence of royalty—for even there, whilst others were suffered to pass with but the usual form, she had been detained with some polite notice—by her name attracting the attention of the queen—her grandfather having been a personal friend and favorite of the royal family.

Giulia had returned home with much the same degree of surprise that the poet must

have experienced, who awoke one morning and found himself famous.

“And pray, what did my little Gertrude do?” inquired Mr. Hamilton at dinner, when all the events of the morning were detailed for his amusement, and Giulia’s success was listened to by him with good-humoured pleasure.

Mrs. Hamilton, whose worldly experience made her perfectly wide awake to the powerful advantage possessed by the Baroness over her own daughter, was in no way discomfited or disappointed; indeed, at this moment, a plan had entered her sanguine brain, and she saw no reason against its accomplishment —it was one of sufficient importance, to render Gertrude’s interest for the time being, a secondary consideration.

“Oh, Gertrude!” she exclaimed, in answer to her husband’s question; “she did very well — she had one of the best *partis* hovering around her, almost all the

time, and who escorted her to the carriage.

"And who was that?" asked Gertrude, with some eagerness.

"Upon my word," replied her mother, "the gentleman seems not to have made much impression upon you—why, do you not know it was Lord Beverley?"

"Lord Beverley!" she exclaimed, with a pettish toss of the head; "yes, truly, hovering about me, in order to talk and laugh with you, Mama, all the time."

"Yes, darling," replied the mother, "but it was to look at you, and to say, I assure you, many flattering things, which, of course, he did not dare to address directly to you, even had you seemed inclined to attend to him — no wonder he talked to me, when your eyes were wandering in every direction but the poor man's. But, dear Annie, how pale you look — you must be ill!"

Poor Annie!—yes, she could sit and hear the budding hopes and joys, and triumphs of others dwelt upon with the same youthful, hopeful heart—and she, cut out from their participation—though, perhaps naturally, more formed for the enjoyment of life, than either of the two young girls, who were beginning to taste from the cup of pleasure, and she could listen to all this without a repining or envious thought. It was the loss of her beauty, she knew, that had altered her position. By whose hand the blow had been inflicted, she had taught herself ever to remember — she had learnt to endure it as coming from Him, from whom she merited nothing, and who had bestowed upon her so much. But how often is it felt, that whilst there may be always found, if rightly received, many a balm and healing, even in the severest dispensations, which appear to our feeble minds, to come direct from the hand of God, those wounds which seem, to ou-

weak senses, especially inflicted by the intervention of our fellow creatures, are often more difficult to bear. Annie's heart was not yet sufficiently nerved to endurance, to hear the once-loved name of that being who had excited in her breast feelings not easily suppressed—and who, now she learnt, had so easily forgotten her.

She depicted him in her imagination all smiles—all admiration for another—her own sister!—forgetful of those flattering marks of preference he had once lavished on herself. Mrs. Hamilton, it is needless to say, had no idea to what extent his attentions had been advanced, when she had thus carelessly spoken—although, perhaps, the idea now darted through her quick perceptions, for she changed the subject — it was too late, however, for poor Annie left the table in tears,

"A wounded spirit, who can bear!"

Mrs. Gordon had an opportunity of seeing Giulia at a ball given by the Hamiltons the night before her departure, and to observe the change effected in her whole demeanour by the influence of the new position in which she now felt herself placed as the courted Lady De Crespigny ; and it re-called to her the effect produced on the mind of her niece, when under the spell of *Fra Paolo* ; for, though Giulia was naturally possessed of a composure, even of a dignity of deportment, which, now the crushing feeling of inferiority was removed, seemed to assert its authority, and prevent any undue appearance of elation, yet Mrs. Gordon, who knew her so well, and who watched her with such keen interest, could easily discern the tremulous exhilaration which fluttered at her heart, lighting up her eyes and imparting even a glow to her pale complexion.

“ Well, dear Giulia, I leave you in a world

not so utterly joyless and hopeless, as that which you seemed to anticipate it would prove to you," said Mrs. Gordon, when retiring early from the ball-room, her niece followed her for a few moments to her apartment—for she was to set off early on the morrow.

Giulia could not but assent with conscious smile.

"And I may tell them all at home, that you are very happy, but that you will not forget those you have left, and that you will not be sorry to return amongst us—shall I tell them this?"

"Oh! yes," hastily answered the young Baroness, no doubt thinking at that moment of the dance for which she was engaged; "you will give, dear aunt, all my presents to Francesco and Nice."

Giulia paused, as she pronounced this last name, and her countenance underwent a change.

"I may tell Nice, I suppose," said Mrs. Gordon, smiling, "that you do manage to drag on your miserable existence without her."

Giulia coloured, but said with some appearance of alarm,

"Tell her, I will write to her very often — and that I miss her very much— and—"

"That you would have sent her many more messages," interposed Mrs. Gordon, "but, that you are thinking of the forlorn cavalier, who is now, doubtless, seeking in every direction for his partner. Well, God bless you, my dear girl," she added, in a graver and more earnest tone, as she dismissed her with a tender embrace; "may you find many friends in this new world of yours; but put not your trust too firmly in any, but that One, who can alone guide you with perfect wisdom."

As Lady de Crespigny proceeded to join the dancers, in passing through a deserted an-

room, some one seated on a couch in a recess attracted her eye, and on the person looking up, she saw the face of Annie.

She approached to ask if the dance had begun, and was told that it had, but that her partner having heard that she was engaged, was now dancing with Gertrude. The partner was Lord Beverley.

Giulia perceived, as Annie gave her this information, that her face was very pale, and that the traces of tears were on her cheeks. She was surprised, and turned away her face, as if not to observe it, and then asked whether she would return with her to the ball-room.

"Not just now, Lady de Crespigny, thank you," answered Annie, and there was such a deep tone of dejection in her voice, that Giulia felt shocked. She did not like to leave her abruptly, and yet scarcely knew how to carry on the conversation.

"Have you not been dancing?" she began, merely for the sake of breaking the silence, and then felt that she had uttered exactly what she ought not to have said, "for perhaps," she thought, "nobody has asked her to dance, and that is the reason of her melancholy."

But she was mistaken. With Annie's well disciplined mind, such a cause could scarcely have drawn the bitter tears from her eyes, even had it been the case—but it was not likely that the eldest daughter of the house should be thus neglected—one too, whom the relentless hand of the dread disease had not robbed of every charm.

No—even *he* had danced once with her that night—but oh! how far rather would she have preferred utter neglect, than that studied, constrained attention so evidently expressing the words,

"Poor girl, I would not for the world hurt

your feelings by any marked change or want of attention—but really I must not let you suppose that I can now mean anything serious—for with all your amiability, I could not make up my mind to marry a wife disfigured by the small-pox."

And then to see him turn with such evident relief to seek her sister's pretty face, and laugh and chat, his eyes following her steps even whilst he coldly held her hand in the dance---her whole frame in the meantime thrilling at the touch, or uttering cold, abrupt words, inattentive to the low, trembling answers."

But even for this poor Annie was thankful. It was the first time since the change in her appearance that she had thus met him.

She thought, poor girl! that after the first moment of weakness on hearing his name mentioned by her mother, that she had nerved her mind by reason and proper pride for every trial which she might expect; but alas, for human weakness, to witness the reverse was

more than her strength could bear, and to feel the shame and humiliation of this weakness added gall to the bitterness of her spirit. The agony of her heart produced the power of conjuring up evil thoughts of murmurings to her mind, and caused her, instead of shaking off the first risings of the morbid feelings, as had ever been her wont, to creep into solitude to indulge them—unmissed—unsought—as once she would have been—by him!

Smarting almost to madness from these cruel reflections, when poor Annie was addressed by the Baroness with the question,

“Have you not danced to-night?” she exclaimed on the impulse of the moment, with a smile and tone of voice tinged by the bitterness from which her heart was suffering,

“Oh, yes, so much, that I ought to feel particularly grateful to those, who have taken compassion on me. Yes, Lady de Crespigny,” she continued, whilst the bitterness which

could not dwell long in her heart, dispersed after this little ebullition of temper, "you must know that people are not very fond of an ugly partner in a ball-room."

Giulia coloured, and an uneasy feeling arose in her heart.

"So I thought," she exclaimed, "but—" she hesitated, "they dance with me."

"Ah—but you have rank—fortune," said Annie, involuntarily, not able to repress a smile at the serious tone in which those words had been pronounced, "and you will find that those advantages are quite sufficient in the eyes of the world, to cover every other deficiency. And I assure you," she continued in a gay tone, noticing the effect her words had produced on Giulia, who stood silently before her, all her old feelings seeming, by her darkening brow, to be spreading gradually over the young peeress's heart, "you are beautiful for a Baroness."

"A Baroness!" exclaimed Giulia in a moody tone, "I would gladly dispense with the title, if for that alone I am to be loved—but loved I never was, and never shall be," she murmured unintelligibly. "Annie, I am worse off than you are, although you may have lost your beauty, for still you are loved—fondly loved by all—but I—"

"I was wrong," exclaimed Annie, "very wrong to speak as I have done to you—to utter from an impulse which was faulty in the extreme, insinuations which are unkind--untrue; as if there were not many who loved you for yourself alone! I was most wrong, and most ungrateful," she added, tears filling her eyes, "for I am the last who ought to dare to say, that the want of beauty has robbed me of the affections of those I value—as you say, I am still loved by many---dearly---tenderly loved. And therefore—" she added, brushing away the tears which continued to gather in

her eyes, and smiling cheerfully, “ I will lay to my soul the flattering unction, that those who have changed towards me, with my altered face, were not worth being loved by me, and learn to bless the small-pox, for enabling me to discover the chaff from the wheat in my list of friends.”

These last words were uttered more to herself than to her companion, who was not one to whom she could have looked for sympathy ; she was therefore startled by hearing Giulia exclaim—

“ Was there any one who *did* change ?”

Annie writhed for a moment beneath the question, and then answered quickly with a sad smile,

“ Yes ! so Lady de Crespigny, I think, I have, after all, laid claim to precedence in misery—you complained of the misery of never yet having been loved—is it not worse to have tasted

that happiness, and then to lose it—the love too of one who I can scarcely make up my mind to class among the chaff."

"Oh, no!" sighed Giulia with an intensity of tone which caused Annie to turn her eyes upon her companion's face with a look of surprise. "Once to have felt yourself loved---really loved---although but for an hour, must be a delight to last for a whole life-time!"

"I did not know you were so romantic, Giulia," said Annie. "I must endeavour," she continued with a sad smile, "although it will be difficult for one so unromantic as myself to accomplish it—to exist on the delights of memory—to feed on the happiness of the past, to preserve me from starving in the barren present. But this is a new theory of yours, Lady de Crespigny, you know what Dante says—

"Nessun maggiore dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria.

But come!—what sentiment in a London
ball-room! here is mama too looking for you,
how she would have laughed if she had heard
our conversation!

CHAPTER XVI.

" And with my years my soul began to pant
With feelings of strange tumult and soft pain,
And the whole heart exhaled into One Want ;
But undefined and wandering till the day
I found the thing I sought—and that was thee."

Byne

Two years have passed, and again we ret
to our Baroness, and find her—the second
her London season—in a crowded ball room
St. James's Palace.

" What is the matter with Lady de C

pigny?" whispered one of the company to his neighbour, "I went up to ask her to dance just now, and she was actually in tears, so I made my escape as quickly as possible."

"What the little demure Baronee?"

"Yes, and a handsome young cavalier was standing close to her."

"Oh! a love affair I suppose."

"Well the tears seem to prognosticate more success to this suitor, than to others who have made the attempt to win her Ladyship's favor; for she generally turns away and looks sulky, if any unlucky wight presumes at all beyond the ceremonious words of courtesy; I believe she is afraid of interested designs. Ah, there she is, looking quite bright and animated, upon the cavalier's arm, Mrs. Hamilton smiling sweetly upon them."

"Of course," replied the other, "it is her son, young Hamilton, just returned from Spain with dispatches; a most convenient arrangement for a younger brother with two or

three sons, to have a young Baroness for a ward."

Our readers will no doubt be anxious to hear, what effect time had produced upon our heroine. We saw her upon her first entrance into the world—elated and excited by the new position in which she found herself so suddenly placed; but when that "lightning flash" of excitement had passed away, she began to pause and analyse that which she had at first enjoyed in happy ignorance—for surely, in that case, "ignorance is bliss," like the fingering botanist, she destroyed the flowers, whose scent and beauty pass away quite soon enough of themselves, and which others with less foolish wisdom are content to enjoy. Giulia possessed rank and affluence, but not beauty; to her position then was she indebted for every attention and favour which was bestowed upon her—and though probably she would have been ill pleased if the deference which was invariably shewn towards

her, had been withdrawn, still she persuaded herself to look on every action with suspicion and distrust. Station and affluence brought with it many advantages—many blessings which might have ensured contentment and happiness to a well regulated heart ; the power of doing good was hers—of drawing upon her head the blessings of the poor ; and it must be owned this power she did not neglect. Though certainly not a beauty, the young Baroness could not have been the child of her parents, and not have inherited something of the peculiar grace for which they had both been remarkable--and a very inconsiderable share of personal attractions will suffice, joined to the influence, which high birth and fortune seldom fail to exercise. Thus, though the Baroness's cheek might be less fair, her features less faultless than many of those around her, eyes less sweetly soft, or brightly beautiful, many would have gloried in her well shaped arm and bust—her taper fingers—and mig-

nonne feet ; and then even what in others might have been deemed stupidity, insipidity, ill-temper or pride, in the little Peeress was considered as an evidence of wisdom, of embryo talent. Poor geniuses flocked to her for patronage, and literati of every grade disdained not to court her, to enter into their *clique* ; so that, at nineteen, the girl who had come into the world of fashion, shrinking from the expectation of slight and neglect, found herself in a position, which must have more than fulfilled the sanguine hopes of the most confident and assured--but still she was dissatisfied and unhappy. This may seem unnatural ; however those who have studied the intricacies of the human heart, well know how constantly that which we have looked upon when far off, or seemingly out of reach, as a possession too exquisite ever to be attained, when unexpectedly and suddenly it is acquired, the treasure melts into nothing within our grasp, and still more so if amongst

the cluster of blessings already attained, there lacks one desire which is still but as a dream---something to be hoped for---longed for.---Then will that want be dwelt upon---nursed---shaped into a form of beauty and delight. Like as when we fix our stedfast gaze on one of those bright stars which deck the firmament of night, all others seem to wax dim and fade from our sight, so the one only want becomes the all in all ; its attainment, the sole means it is imagined, of constituting happiness.

What was all that she had hitherto tasted but vanity, when the longings which had visited her during the days of her joyless childhood growing with her growth, and strengthening with her strength, was still unsatisfied---She might have imagined perhaps that power- -influence---and station, might be glorious gifts ; but they had never been the joys for which she had panted---they might have been brought in merely as gildings to her fancied picture of romance, but *to be loved*

was the ambition of the young girl! for that she had pined in childhood—*to be loved* as she saw others loved was the longing desire of her heart; and the want of this love was the cloud which darkened her brow, when we first met her in the earlier years of her life.

It was this want of love, which at that time crushed her spirit—but now the feeling had begun to wear a different form, and clothe itself in other vestments more dangerous and exciting. Perhaps the flame of imagination might have been fanned by the works of fancy in which she had been so freely allowed to indulge—however, much greater mischief may be ascribed to the still more dangerous effect produced by the excessive intimacy of Giulia with the Italian girl, more especially when that one, precocious in every way—and less pure in mind, with consummate art, acquired an entire and arbitrary influence over the weak, but more innocent

nature of the young Baroness. Parents would do well to look with a cautious eye upon such friendships, for truly, in most cases they are pernicious evils!

In Giulia's case, the perilous effect of evil communication was most fatal to her future career. Tendencies morbidly indulged, which might have been counteracted by the healthful companionship of her right minded aunt and innocent sister, had been increased and strengthened by the influence of the artful Nice. Although Lady de Crespiigny's junior by nearly a year, she possessed all the earlier maturity of mind, and strength of passion, for which her *compatriotes* are distinguished ; and it was under the tutorage of her Italian friend that those morbid feelings were fashioned, whence sprang in Giulia's breast, a fancied passion for the only one whose kindness and consideration had ever excited sentiments of gratified affection in her chilled young heart—sentiments which it is so easy for imagination to conjure up into a warmer

feeling, especially when the absence of *l'objet aimé* left the fancy full scope to revel in the charms of ideal bliss, investing the personification of her thoughts with perfection, which the actual presence might have dispelled.

The vision indeed had somewhat faded, on Giulia's entrance into all the unsentimental realities of a London world, and her imaginative powers might have been blunted, had the attractions which surrounded her yielded, her for any length of time, satisfaction; but those new pleasures soon losing their power, she returned again to seek that old world of fancy, till all around became dark and wearisome, and still the dream of happiness was the same —the love of him who still tarried amidst the blood-stained laurel groves of Spain. But though a dream may long be sweet to dwell upon for itself alone, the time will come, when we begin to long for its realization.—So was it now with Giulia. She grew weary of

the empty vision of happiness, and had half determined to dream no more.

She had come to London this season, with a heart throbbing high with hope and expectation. Sir —— and his *attaché* were expected home immediately, but another dispatch brought the intelligence that their departure was unavoidably postponed.

It was but a short time after this disappointment, that the Hamiltons and Lady de Crespiigny were at a ball at St. James on the night just mentioned. In a most misanthropical mood Giulia had accompanied her friends— refusing to dance on the plea of a headache, and having been separated from Mrs. Hamilton, she encounoced herself on a couch in a withdrawing room, repulsing by cold looks and monosyllabic answers, any endeavours to draw her into conversation.

It was unusual for the young Baroness to be seen in public thus absent and meditative, but with the reputation for genius which she

had acquired, this rather unseasonable deportment, in one so young, was attributed to that cause which was rather interesting than otherwise.

It was often in scenes of gaiety, that Giulia found herself more than ever inclined to turn in spirit from the "stir unprofitable, and the fear of the world" around her, to that visionary existence, as unprofitable--and still more vain, which she cherished within her breast. But those who observed her countenance this night must have concluded, that some very dark and difficult point of science was perplexing her mind, for never had her brow looked more overcast, as if with care or weariness.

The truth was, besides other causes, Giulia was becoming impatient of her empty dream; it seemed, indeed, fated to be never realized--but as she felt it fading away--only the more did she experience the dreary vacuity its departure would leave. And these thoughts were very bitter as she thus sat alone. She

could no longer dream, and all reality seemed dark and cheerless. She must resign herself to the fate for which she had been born — “a long, long night without a morning.”

Like one who has wandered long with sanguine heart, far in the search of some hidden treasure—something which for many a weary day has been

“A hope—love
Still longed for, never seen.”

but who, at length, weary, discouraged, sinks down on the way side in despair, so felt Giulia. She had bent her head to push the jewelled *bandeau* from her brow, now really aching from the weight of the joyless thoughts which pressed upon her mind, when suddenly a voice thrilled through her breast—and, as it were, stiffened every fibre of her

body—for her hand was still raised, her brow bent.

“ Giulia, my dear Giulia !” she next heard uttered. Her arm dropped, and with a long drawn sigh, to recover the long suspended powers within her breast, and with the blood flowing again from the heart to which it had been suddenly propelled, she raised her head, ashamed and provoked, at the pitch of nervousness to which her imagination had reduced her ; for it was only Mrs. Hamilton’s voice which she had heard — yes, Mrs. Hamilton’s, with that peculiar, silvery little laugh, with which she usually accompanied her words when pleased or amused ; and Giulia looked up, and met—not the merry glance of her dark eyes, but one from clear blue, as the summer sky, which again stopped the beating of her heart, and of every pulse in her frame. She gazed, bewildered for a moment, as if she doubted

whether her eyes now could be deceived by her imagination, as before her ears had been. She turned them on Mrs. Hamilton, whom she now also saw before her — the latter laughed joyfully—and again those first tones were heard.

"So my prophecy is fulfilled, and Lady De Crespigny has forgotten her old friend, Claud Hamilton!"

"Oh! there are looks and tones that dart
An instant sun-shine through the heart,
As if the soul that minute caught
Some treasure it through life had sought,
As if the very lips and eyes
Predestined to have all our sighs,
And never be forgot again,
Sparkled and spoke before as then!"

As if an ice-bolt had suddenly melted in Giulia's heart, there gushed from her eyes a shower of tears; faster and thicker they soon were falling—her hand in his---for Claud was in another instant seated by her side; and,

whilst shading her from observation, his voice, which seemed now as if it had been heard but yesterday, instead of in their parting interview four years ago, was whispering in her ear, kind, soothing words.

And when those tears at length ceased, almost as suddenly as they had begun, as such unexpected bursts of emotion often do, Giulia was surprised to feel the effect they had produced upon her—There was none of the nervous constraint--the ecstasy, more pain than pleasure, which she imagined she might have experienced after such a meeting. She found herself soon able to enter into conversation with feelings, such as she had never experienced before, of that calm, delicious pleasure felt at knowing oneself to be by the side of a dear friend, from whom we have been parted.

Claud explained to her the cause of his unexpected arrival. Despatches were to be for-

warded to England, and to his surprise and pleasure, he had been appointed their bearer; that being obliged to consign them immediately and personally into the hands of the minister--whom he found was dining at Carlton House--he had proceeded there, and had been detained by the Regent; who, with his usual good-nature, having ascertained that the Hamiltons were not aware of their son's arrival, planned for them an agreeable surprise, and a meeting had taken place with his father and mother in a private apartment.

"There I have been," Claud continued, "closeted for the last hour, hearing all the family politics; and a great deal, I can assure you, of Lady De Crespigny. Why, Giulia," he added, "may I still name you thus familiarly? what a favourite you seem to be with my mother!"

Giulia's face glowed with pleasure, and her

heart beat with satisfaction at these words, as she murmured,

“ Am I really ?”

“ Oh, yes ! she has been lauding you up to the skies !”

“ Indeed ! she should not so have raised your expectations,” exclaimed Giulia, with a mixture of surprise, pleasure, and annoyance ; “ you will soon discover that I am but the same as I ever was.”

“ Oh, no !” said Claud, “ not the poor, low-spirited little girl, who used to mope in the gloomy library at Shirley Hall ! Oh, no ! from what I hear of you, you must be very different —but this reminds me—how is that sweet, little sister of yours—is she as pretty and merry as ever ? What a pet she used to be of mine ! And my dark Italian friend and instructress, with her very soft voice and peculiar eyes, which I have never forgotten—is she still with you, or has she been carried off to the

convent — the thoughts of which, she seemed to relish so little?"

"Nice is in London," said Giulia, slightly colouring.

"Indeed! By-the-bye, did I not hear some strange story about a Catholic priest getting in amongst you, and doing all sorts of mischief? I am glad he was *chasséed* as soon as possible. You do not know, Giulia, what a horror, all that I have seen abroad of the wretched bigotry, hypocrisy, and ignorance of the Roman Catholics, has given me of that religion, and particularly of their priests."

Giulia again coloured, and then turned pale; but Claud's eyes were now wandering in search of his mother, who had left them together immediately on beholding the meeting which had surprised her in no small degree.

"Shall we go now, and look after some of the party?" Claud Hamilton exclaimed, "my

mother insisted on my sisters dancing — which I was flattered to see they were loth to do. They will be quite jealous of our long conversation — they used always to be a little so of my Shirley sisters, as I used to call you all. Poor Annie is sadly altered — it shocked me greatly—but she is a dear girl, and must always be lovely in my eyes, if she is still the same in heart—and what is beauty after all? Ah!" the young man continued, "there is *my* beauty. I never saw any one like my mother; really, she seems to have grown younger and more delightful than ever!" And he drew Lady De Crespigny's arm within his, and advanced with her to meet Mrs. Hamilton, who was approaching them all bright, radiant smiles ; whilst in her bearing to Giulia, there was added to her usual kind manner, something of gentle affection, to which Giulia's heart assented gladly ; and strange was the change which a few moments had wrought

upon her feelings—now they were all softened, brightened; every object, every circumstance which, so short a time before, would have fallen hardly on her heart, was now viewed with cheerfulness and hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

You are meek and humble mouth'd ;
You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,
With meekness and humility ; but your heart
Is cramm'd with arrogancy, spleen and pride.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE Marchesa di Lante and her son were members of one of those families at enmity with the usurping powers, who had at the period in question gained dominion in their own country—for this cause they had emigrated to England for protection and safety.

They occupied apartments in Mivart's Hotel, and it is in one of these, a drawing-room, darkened so as to exclude the searching rays of the bright May sun, that we find them.

The Marchesa was reclining upon a couch, she was evidently in delicate health--her age might be about fifty. Ever since her sojourn in England, pining for her own luxurious country, and lamenting the hardships of her lot, had been her occupation. She was not alone--her complaints had been poured forth into the ears of a young countrywoman. At one glance it was impossible to mistake her, who sat somewhat behind the Marchesa, performing to perfection the duty of an interested and sympathising listener--a duty which by the bye requires a little tact and cleverness, by chiming in occasionally in the softest and sweetest accents, ejaculations of sympathy--interest--horror or surprise, according to the several communications of the narrator; but in the tightly compressed lips--

bent brow—and fixed eye of the young girl—it was evident that matters were occupying her mind, more deeply interesting to her than the puerile causes, which called forth the fretful murmurings of her companion.

The girl was attired in the extreme of simplicity—a plain white dress, a string of large ebony beads, to which hung a cross of the same material—her sole ornament. She was however highly attractive to the eye of a stranger, from the peculiar style of her beauty—for beautiful, few would not have scrupled to call her, though it was not of that character, which seems to draw our hearts, whilst we gaze, with a gentle, irresistible control; the loveliness of her we describe was rather of that cast, which, whilst it fascinates the eye, either causes the heart to recoil, or attracts it with a passionate sway, painfully fatal to the victim.

But we need not pause more minutely to pourtray her picture, as the readers will have

only to image to themselves the Italian girl of Shirley Hall, though now we recognize Nice in all the matured beauty of eighteen—that rosy time of life, marked however in her case in its ripening nature, by the strengthening qualities of a mind, whose early sparks nourished into flame, though concealed and stifled long by the opposing powers of secretiveness and policy, were forced by circumstances to rest content with the trivial underworkings, which opportunity had only yet allowed them. Now under a different aspect of affairs, the energies of her mind seemed ready when required to burst forth, in order to undertake the work for which they were adapted.

It had been a difficult task for the girl to curb the vehement temperament of her character over the long delay of the fulfilment of her ardent wishes; she panted for scope and opportunity for action. Her hope for a long time had centered in the Baroness, and all the

influence she had acquired over her friend was put in force to work her purpose, and only the more eager did she become, when her discerning eyes began gradually to perceive that her influence was in danger of some diminution. She saw that while contact with the world had given her more confidence in herself, it had also made her more suspicious of others, more tenacious of any attempt at being overruled by her friend. Nice, was satisfied that her power was far from being gone, but she had need of more manœuvring than heretofore, and with a greater degree of ardour, thirsted for the fulfilment of her desires.

The long separation from Giulia was the circumstance which she considered most detrimental to her influence. The Baroness not only spent her seasons in London, but afterwards accompanied the Hamiltons in their visits to the country seats of their friends.

Tired at length by the repeated promises of **Lady de Crespigny** to effect a visit for her to **London**, and provoked by the failure of her **hopes**, she became at length quite dispirited.

It was long since Nice had heard from her **uncle** the priest; the last intelligence she had received of him was, his being in Ireland, but it was his intention soon to visit England, having been appointed superior to a convent lately established in this country, much resorted to by a community of emigrants. The young girl had the constant terror hanging over her head, of a summons to form one of their number.

The cloven foot began to show itself by out-breakings of her irritated temper; as far indeed as **it** could leave any possible excuse for exhibiting itself, for there was something in the **mild**, firm, but invariable kindness of Mrs. **Gordon's** demeanour towards her, which rendered it difficult to find a pretext for any ebullition of the fierce passions which strug-

gled in her breast. Francesca, scarcely ever was out of her aunt's sight; so carefully did Mrs. Gordon guard the flower, whose purity she determined no deteriorating breath should sully, from the effects of Nice's companionship; but the domestics began openly to complain of her, and the enmity between Mrs. Rivers and herself threatened to break out into open war--this was at the commencement of the London season. Claud Hamilton was expected home!

Suddenly Nice, as if an evil spirit within her breast had been allayed, again relapsed into meek submission—hope had darted into her heart, but from a quarter most unexpected. She had received the dreaded letter from her uncle, but it contained that which made her heart beat with joy and excitement.

It informed her, that there was now a noble family in England, over whose minds the priest possessed all the control and influence

of a confessor and spiritual father. For their benefit he had devised a plan, and he informed her, that even she might be an assistance to his scheme—he had, therefore, arranged matters accordingly. She was almost immediately to be received as companion to the Marchesa di Lante.

It was some time before Nice could persuade herself, that this could be anything but a dream. But a letter most surely had arrived addressed to Mrs. Gordon from the Marchesa herself, stating that she had received the sanction of the Signora Nice's uncle, to request that she might be sent to her in London, as a companion to her in her present weak state of health and nerves.

Mrs. Gordon, for her own part, could not but contemplate this proposal with satisfaction; and Giulia, when informed of the circumstance, thought of the arrival of her bosom friend in London, with feelings it was difficult exactly to define.

The communication hitherto carried on between the Hamiltons and the di Lante family had been bounded to the distant terms upon which people live in London. They had exchanged visits, and the son had danced occasionally with the Miss Hamiltons.

The Marchese had been introduced to the Baroness, and she had remarked that he often of late, stood gazing on her with strange attention, and sometimes would approach as if to address her—but generally it ended by his turning away with a sort of movement of impatience, almost amounting to a shudder, apparently changing his purpose.

Since the arrival of the Marchesa's young friend, the intercourse of the two families had much advanced in intimacy. The Baroness's carriage might be seen daily before Mivart's Hotel, and detained long enough in attendance to wear out the patience of the most Job-like coachman in London. In that time more went on than Giulia's friends were aware of, or per-

haps they might have been less at ease upon the subject. Nice had been introduced by Lady de Crespigny to the party in Portman Square, and had impressed Mrs. Hamilton with the idea, that she was a humble, unobtrusive girl, but at the same time too striking in appearance to be placed on a familiar footing in the house, her one single visit having evidently been productive of mischief—the nature of which will be seen hereafter.—Mrs. Hamilton therefore, seeing that the Baroness was never satisfied, till she had seen her friend in the course of the day, encouraged her visits to Mivart's Hotel, in preference to those of Nice at her own house.

Nice found her friend favourably disposed to yield herself again to her former influence. In the state of gloomy depression of spirits, in which the Baroness had of late indulged, she had wearied of herself and all around her—it was therefore a sort of relief to have a new resource to which she could fly and receive fancied solace from the

sympathy of the friend of her youth, although the real nature of this sympathy might have seemed merely to consist, on the part of the comforter, in heightening the already sufficiently glowing colours, in which Giulia was pleased to invest her vain imaginations--and this constituted the charm of Nice's friendship. Whilst pursuing the means most calculated to ensure her own interest, she was not forgetful of that task, which had been imposed upon her ability, and to fulfil it to the best of her ability, she considered herself bound, both by duty and interest.

During some part of each of Lady de Crespiigny's visits to Mivart's Hotel, the group which we are now about to describe, might generally be seen to occupy the apartment, to which, at the commencement of the chapter, we introduced our readers. The Marchesa reclining languidly on her couch—Giulia seated in her well arranged carriage dress, but maintaining the cold, shy deportment usual to her

when not exactly at her ease — whilst on a seat by her side, but generally soon pushed a little in her rear, might be seen a young man of about the age of twenty one, of dark, haughty appearance—it was Il Marchese di Lante. His eyes were generally riveted with a sullen, moody expression on the fourth person of the group, the Italian girl, Nice, who having seen the two latter thus arranged, as if she considered her duty performed, would place herself exactly opposite, busying herself apparently with some piece of work, her eyes bent upon it; only raising them suddenly to fix upon the Marchese a glance from which he seemed to shrink, as from a lightning flash, though, as if fascinated, he withdrew not his earnest gaze.

Thus they would sit for some time, scarcely any more lively conversation diverting the time, than the sleepy drawl of the Marchesa, eliciting now and then a soft, respectful remark from Nice, and the notice which civility demanded, from Lady de Crespigny.

As for the son, rousing himself occasionally from his abstraction with evident effort, I would address the Baroness in an absent and constrained manner, but after the exchange of a few murmuring speeches, they both would come to a stand still. Giulia wondered why Nice made such a point of beseeching her to undergo every day, what seemed to give a little pleasure to others as to herself. And indeed it did not seem that any end was being ensured, or matters proceeding in the manner likely to procure for Nice, the commendation of the master who had set her to do the work which it was his pleasure should be accomplished, and which the course of the story will reveal to the reader.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The cold in clime, are cold in blood,
Their love can scarce deserve the name,
But mine is like the Lava flood
That boils in Etna's breast of flame."

BYRON'S GIAOUR.

"How is it that your friend Lady de Crespiigny does not come to-day?" enquired the Marchesa of Nice, as the usual time for the Baroness's visit passed away, and Giulia came not.

"I am ignorant of the cause of her absence,

Signora," answered the Italian girl, as at the same time she darted a glance towards the window, much at variance with the meek tone of her reply, "but probably," she continued, "the Baroness has been delayed, and will be here at a later hour."

"Nice," the Marchesa resumed, "I have been thinking deeply upon the subject, and I am of opinion that matters are not proceeding as rapidly, or in as satisfactory a manner as they ought to do, with regard to my son's views respecting the young Lady de Crespigny. I see no advancement of intimacy between di Lante and your friend, nothing beyond the formal act of sitting every day for half an hour, side by side, like two icicles. I cannot see how that is to expedite the affair. Your uncle says, it *must be*, and his word is always law; he told me, he had prevailed on Phillipo to consent, but now he is quite fero-cious whenever I mention the subject, and says he will not be hurried into swallowing

the gilded, but bitter pill, for to such he likens a marriage with your friend; and indeed far worse, he declares he hates her, and speaks wildly and foolishly on the subject.

Nice turned her head away, and a smile of scornful meaning curled her lip.

"I am sure," continued the Marchesa, "though she may not be beautiful, la Giulia is very amiable, is she not, mia Nice? You should tell him all this, and describe the extent of her riches, the grandeur and elegance of her palazzos. Oh! how charming is the anticipation, of finding myself out of this smoky city, surrounded by all the luxuries of that charming Shirley Hall, of which you so often speak."

A smile crossed the features of Nice as the remembrance of the gloomy old mansion flitted before her recollection.

"I will do my best, Signora La Marchesa," she again humbly answered, "and my uncle,

you know, will soon be here, and he can do all things."

"He can indeed," said the Marchesa with solemnity, and reverence in her manner, "he has the power of even taming Phillipo's fiery spirit, and bending it to his will. I wish indeed he would come. I am sure we have done all we can. But hush! here is Phillipo coming up stairs. I am going to prepare for my drive, but you, *cara* Nice, must stay at home, to wait for your dear friend, and keep Phillipo in until she comes; do all you can to expedite matters, and save me the trouble of any further suspense."

Nice bowed her head in sign of obedient assent, whilst a scornful glance shot from her glittering eyes, as the Marchesa left the room. She remained alone, but not for long; in another moment the door opened, and the young Marchese entered, and having first cast a hurried glance around the room, uttered a

"*Grazia Dio,*" and impetuously drawing a seat to Nice's side, flung himself into it, and seizing her hand, raised it fervently to his lips.

Nice lifted her eyes to his face, in which were concentrated all their fiery power, whilst in her soft voice she murmured, her hand still resting in his,

" This will never do, Marchese — my uncle ! "

" Well, what of him ? " the young man exclaimed passionately. " Let him come—I will tell him that I love you, that I renounce all the ambitious views he entertains on my behalf, that I will henceforth bow to no power but that of love—the ardent love that burns in my heart for the beautiful Nice."

" Rather open the gates of the convent, and with your own hands place the veil upon the head of her, who it will hide for ever from your sight. Do you for a moment imagine

that the most devoted love in the world would weigh a feather's weight in his eyes, when not only the interest of your family is at stake, but also that of the Holy Church herself. He considers your union with the Baroness de Crespigny of vital advantage to the church, as well as to the house of di Lante, for whom he wishes the accession of a rich English Baroness, and the church would thus secure a member in herself, and her descendants. One word then of your love, and farewell for ever to Nice."

At this moment a carriage was heard to stop before the door. The Marchese again seizing the hand of the beautiful Italian girl, exclaimed in a low, passionate tone,

" Then tell me one word—give me one smile at least, in assurance of your love, and on that I will exist till—"

Nice withdrew her hand and pushed away her chair — for steps were heard ascending

the stairs — but she smiled, and whether or not, it was intended for the assurance required by the Marchese, so he seemed to interpret it, for with an impassioned “*Grazia Nice adorata* ;” he arose, and then sunk upon a more distant seat, just as the door was thrown open and the Baroness was announced.

“ You are late to-day, Lady De Crespigny,” said Nice, after receiving the embrace with which her friend had hurried forward to greet her; she, merely rising from her seat, demonstrating none of that respectful humility generally observed by the Italian towards her superiors.

“ Yes, dear Nice; and I cannot stay now to explain the cause,” Guila answered, bowing at the same moment to the Marchese who she now, for the first time perceived. “ They are waiting for me in the carriage; and I merely came in now, to bring you an

invitation from Mrs. Hamilton, to dine in Portman Square this evening. You must, indeed—you will meet an old friend, one whom you will be so glad to see."

Nice during this speech, was looking fixedly at her friend. She saw at once, that one of those changes had taken place since last they met, in Giulia's state of mind—such as is often seen during life—by an event or incident the most trivial, which has given as different a color to the whole existence, as a movement of the kaleidescope does to that which we view in its interior.

The quick eye of the Italian girl in a glance described the ill concealed excitement of her look and manner, the unusual animation of her countenance, her meaning—conscious smile, above all, the colour which came and went in torrents to her face as she spoke, and Nice asked no further question, but saying, with the Marchesa's permission, she would do

herself the honour of accepting Mrs. Hamilton's invitation, she suffered Giulia to depart.

"Has Sir —— arrived from Spain?" she abruptly enquired, after having for a few moments sat plunged in thought; and when she lifted up her eyes, with an impatient look of enquiry, the passionate gaze of the Marchese was fixed upon her countenance.

"Who?—What?—Ah, I understand," he stammered—startled by an expression upon his beloved's countenance, which he had never before beheld in its undisguised character.
"Yes—no—I remember—"

"Who?—speak di Lante," cried Nice, in an authoritative tone of voice, for she felt no need of feigned meek humility, in the presence of one, who she saw was as a slave before her.

"His name—ah, I know it not, Nice, but I will shew you if you wish it;" and taking

up a paper, he cast his eyes over it, and then commenced reading in his foreign accent—

“ Last evening, dispatches under the charge of Mr. Claud Hamilton to——”

“ *Basta!*” cried Nice, and she arose with a peculiar smile upon her lips. The Italian observed it, and his hot blood boiling up, as a sudden thought flashed upon his mind, he placed his hand upon her arm as she advanced towards the door, fiercely exclaiming—

“ And wherefore does this news affect you? what of *him*? ”

“ *Him*—what do you mean?” cried the girl, turning towards the Marchese with an air of offended dignity.

“ Forgive me Nice, but what of that Mr. Hamilton? ”

“ Ah, is that all? I will tell you. She—the Baroness—your future spouse,” and she smiled sarcastically, “ loves this Claud Hamilton, or rather dreams she does so; I have much now upon my hands, for woe to me, if by any ne-

THE
BOSOM FRIEND.
A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“THE GAMBLER’S WIFE,” “THE YOUNG PRIMA DONNA,”
&c., &c., &c.

“A bosom serpent—a domestic evil.”

POPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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—
1845.



THE
BOSOM FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

“ Ah, that deceit should steal such gentle shapes,
And with a visor vision hide deep vice.”

SHAKSPERE.

The family were assembled in the drawing-room in Portman Square, when the young Italian girl was announced, and made her reverence to the party with her usual modest grace.

There are few, at least of novices society, who, on entering a room filled wi comparative strangers, do not feel some degr of that embarrassment, which, in the me bashful, confuses the vision and prevents the for the first few moments from distinguishi severally the persons and objects around. If there are who possess sufficient presence mind, to enable them to exercise that keen ness of perception, Phrenologists class und the head of individuality—that is to say, t power of being able at one *coup d'œil* take in collectively, and individually, eve object around. But the faculty was high developed in Nice—in one glance, ere humb curtseying she bent her eyes to the groui not only every person, but their exact positio and the expression even of their countenanc were distinctly observed.

There sat Mrs. Hamilton with her scrnising glance turned quickly upon her, as she rose to greet the new comer—the daug

ters talking and laughing with their father, Lord Beverley standing near Mrs. Hamilton leaning against the mantel-piece, with a careless but somewhat graver expression than was his wont; and Giulia—not the Giulia with the clouded, absent countenance, which had characterized her demeanour from her earliest youth—but Giulia serene and happy—her arm encircling little Georgie's waist, her eyes bent down smilingly upon him, as he leant confidingly against her playing with her watch. But she was listening to another who sat by her side, passing his fingers through his little brother's curling locks.

It is unnecessary to say that this was Claud Hamilton. Just before Nice's arrival, Giulia had been speaking of her friend with great affection, and Claud Hamilton was one of those who found enjoyment in giving gratification to others; to please Giulia therefore, he greeted the young Italian with all the frank warmth of manner by which he had

been distinguished of old, and dinner being that moment announced, he gave her his arm and whilst the repast lasted, paid her all the attention, which his kind heart prompted him to shew to the companion of his boyish days not only on her own account—but for the gratification of Giulia, who seemed to understand his motive, and to be grateful for it.

And Nice perceived and understood all this and still more. She saw that Mrs. Hamilton was labouring under excitement and anxiety with a two fold aim in view. She had discovered one of the schemes, in the single visit she had before made in Portman Square, which led to Mrs. Hamilton's evident displeasure, notwithstanding all her graceful manœuvres to attract him to the pretty Gertrude's side. The fickle Lord had devoted himself with parent absorption to her humble self—attentions which the wily girl perhaps might have thought unworthy of being turned to some account, had it not been that v-

the clear-sightedness in discerning designs, possessed usually by those not very single-minded themselves, she had fancied some motive to lurk in his conduct towards herself, and shrewdly guessed that she had been chosen by his Lordship as a convenient and safe subject, on which either to exercise himself in flirting, or for more serious reasons—perhaps as a means of extricating himself from his situation with regard to the Hamiltons, which certainly, if he had no serious intentions with regard to the daughters, was becoming an inconvenient position for him; Lord Beverley however still continued to frequent the house, and people began to talk and wonder whether the fair Gertrude was ever to become Lady Beverley; some even hinted that the fascinating mother was his attraction, and scandal, ever eager to lay hold of the greatest favourites of the world, neglected not to insinuate whispers, too ridiculous however to gain much credence, that his attention or affec-

tion, or whatever it might be called, was not unreturned, and that it was under cover of assiduity to the daughter, that Mrs. Hamilton carried on the flirtation. This absurd rumour having by chance reached Mr. Hamilton's ears, he, for his wife's amusement, repeated it to her.

"Well, so far they are right," she said after having laughed heartily at the communication, "my admiration for Lord Beverley is certainly extreme—so extreme, that I *am* determined to make him my son-in-law. He shall not escape me I *am* resolved; I only wish he would be quick and make up his mind, or some one else will be pouncing upon Gertrude. To have allowed her to refuse one rich baronet for his sake is quite enough; any more such deeds would be tempting Providence."

"Well, dearest, I leave it all to you; I am quite sure you always know what you are about—but one question let me ask—are you certain of Gertrude's feelings?"

"Feelings, my dear George; young ladies know much better how to marry now-a-days, than in our young times, when silly Annie Baillie refused a Marquis's eldest son, to wed a certain George Hamilton—a younger brother! Be assured that Gertrude, with all her pretty, scornful ways, has much more sense than you give her credit for, and is ready to love more wisely, if not so well as her mother;" and Mrs. Hamilton's eyes glistened though they smiled, as she lifted them affectionately to her husband's face.

However, as time rolled on, Mrs. Hamilton began to be impatient, for matters did not proceed in the satisfactory manner she had at first anticipated. Gertrude, who at the commencement of the season had displayed no reluctance to the idea of the fulfilment of her mother's plans, began to be aroused, and to shew that she had no inclination to be trifled with. Lord Beverley had flirted with the beautiful Italian girl, (though this bye the bye,

Mrs. Hamilton hoped might be pique) but worse than all, Claud seemed inclined to examine into the state of affairs; and should the investigation not prove satisfactory to his sensitive feelings, Mrs. Hamilton dreaded lest the whole business might be marred by any premature steps, taken by her less worldly, but strictly honorable son, whose feelings, where his sisters were concerned, were anxious and tenacious in the extreme.

This was one of the sources of uneasiness which the keen eyes of Nice discerned in Mrs. Hamilton. The crafty girl soon decided upon the part she was to act. She plainly saw that it was her interest to appear no stumbling block in her hostess's eyes ; and if, ere this evening, her subtle perception had turned to the mighty suggestions of ambition, which the Earl's attentions might have engendered in her mind, what did it signify to her now, when the flame of passion which had been nursed in secret silence for years—stifled

though not extinguished—again seemed to blaze forth in full force in the presence of the recovered object of her love? Without an effort then she was able to set about her task of ingratiating herself in Mrs. Hamilton's opinion, by her modest and cold discouragement of any attention which this evening Lord Beverley might direct towards her. The other source of Mrs. Hamilton's solicitude was not less evident, and it excited in Nice's breast as much interest, as the other subject had been a matter of perfect indifference to her—this was the evident eagerness, veiled under an assumed carelessness, that Claud should devote himself as much as possible to Giulia. She noted the mother's countenance how it brightened, when she saw her son paying to the Baroness kindly attentions, the calm nature of which Nice perfectly understood, and which did not trouble her for a moment, although a fierce pang shot through her heart, when she

thought of what might be the result of a woman's manœuvres.

"Nice!" said Claud in the course of that evening, "have you heard of the important office to which I have been appointed?"

Nice half started--was he then again to leave the country?—but she commanded herself, and only lifted her eyes enquiringly to his face whilst he continued to talk.

"I have been boasting of my acquirements in the Spanish language, and my mother, determined, I suppose, to make me of some use, suggests my becoming family instructor. Lady de Crespigny has honoured me by consenting to become my pupil, and you really ought to give me this opportunity of paying my debt of gratitude for your instructions in Italian, by joining our class."

"You are very good," Nice answered humbly, "but—"

"Oh, we shall manage it," Claud continued, "so you may consider the plan fixed."

Giulia expressed pleasure at the arrangement, and Mrs. Hamilton smiled agreeably on the prospect, as the mutual desire of her son, and noble young guest; and before Nice departed, it was arranged that the Marchesa, whose consent must be propitiated, should be called upon the next day by some of the party, and talked into good humour and acquiescence.

"Lady de Crespigny is a great favourite with the Marchesa," Nice insinuated, as a hint to Giulia that she relied on her being the one to arrange the business. It would never answer to allow any circumstance to interfere with the visits of the Baroness to Mivart's Hotel--now more than ever necessary!

"Our friend Nice has become very handsome," remarked Claud to Giulia, when she had departed.

As no one but Giulia gave any token of assent to this remark, he turned to his mother

and sisters, and asked if they did not admire her.

"A regular Italian face!" Mrs. Hamilton remarked evasively.

Annie confessed that she did not like her countenance, though her face certainly was very beautiful, and Gertrude, with a laugh, said she considered her very handsome, but begging Giulia's pardon, there was something in the expression of her eyes, that always made her think of a glittering stiletto.

"And your forgiveness also I must crave Lord Beverley, for my remark," she added.

"My forgiveness?" he said abruptly.

"Oh, yes! I see the stiletto eyes have pierced your heart. I wish you joy."

"Thank you!" he answered coldly, his eyes at that moment being fixed absently on a little implement such as Gertrude spoke of, which happened to be in the hands of Annie—who sat quietly working—the sight of which had probably suggested the idea to her sister.

But as the eyes of the fair sempstress were suddenly lifted for a moment to his face, with a quiet, firm glance of grave rebuke, Lord Beverley, started as if, in reality, the little instrument had given him a wound. This glance of reproof was not for her own wrongs — those she had forgiven ; but in the careless cold words to her sister, she saw that towards her also, the same game would be repeated.

"What have I said ? of what am I accused?" Lord Beverley exclaimed, rousing himself and turning to Gertrude.

"Accused?" she replied with a curl of her pretty lip, "it is your own conscience that must accuse you, for after all your admiration of the beautiful Nice is no great crime."

"Admiration, Miss Gertrude ; I am tired of only admiring—I admire no one now—I only love, when it is too late."

The subject was becoming embarrassing to all parties. The two last sentences had been

uttered in a tone scarcely audible, as Lord Beverley stooped to raise something from the ground, yet they discovered on the usually fashionably composed countenance of the Earl, an expression which convinced his hearers, that what he had just uttered were not merely idle words. Gertrude laughed and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER II.

"Love, fame, ambition, avarice—'tis the same,
Each idle—and all ill—and none the worst—
For all are meteors with a different name."

CHILDE HAROLD.

THE Spanish lessons commenced. The Marchesa made no objection, when the Baroness, accompanied by one of the Miss Hamiltons, paid her a visit the following day, and made the request that Nice might be spared

for one hour every morning in order to study the Spanish language with the young party---so Nice was daily with the merry group of students. Any improvement, however, of the pupils might be attributed to the assiduity and quickness of the young scholars, rather than to the master's teaching—for in that art, Claud was no great adept—but then he declared that his sisters laughed at him, and treated him with no sort of respect; in short, there was more laughing and talking going forward than learning, in the study in Portman Square. Giulia alone, serious in her desire to learn the language, remonstrated. Mrs. Hamilton laughingly proposed that she should take a private lesson, and Claud declared that he was quite willing to give up his insubordinate pupils, and thus shew that it was their fault not his, that he did not make the most skilful instructor in the world.

Giulia at first hesitated, and seemed to

draw back, but at last consented to the arrangement, pleading for Nice to be also admitted to the lesson.

"Oh, certainly, I have no objection —no fault to find with her as a pupil, except that —I do not half like her—and never did," he concluded, as Giulia, being suddenly called away, left the room.

"I don't know what it is—she is beautiful—but there is something in that Italian girl's eyes!"

"What they call the *mal occhio* of Italy, I should think," said Gertrude, who seemed, certainly to have no great partiality for Nice.

However, so matters were arranged — and a very different lesson the next proved — very different in its effects and purposes, at least, to the pupils. The handsome young tutor pursued his single-hearted object of obliging the friend of his early years — glad to be able to gratify her taste for languages,

in a manner he thought more agreeable to her, than had she taken lessons of a regular hired master, and he took good-natured pride and pleasure in her progress. He was, seemingly, perfectly unconscious either of the designs of one of his pupils upon himself, or the wounds he was inflicting on the heart of the other. In vain the thrilling, piercing glance—the insinuating smile, or artful sigh, the peculiar tone or meaning words! We do not pretend to insinuate, that a man like Claud, who had lived in the world—who was not unacquainted with the nature of woman's wiles, did not see the flashing glances which darted from brilliant black eyes—but they fell harmless on his heart, for he was guarded from the fascinations of a beauty, in whose every gesture, passion was so strongly expressed, by an antipathy, which had ever existed in his mind towards the Italian girl.

And as little did Claud appear to comprehend the reason of the downcast eye, the

trembling voice, the changing cheek of the other pupil — still the lessons continued. To Giulia, struggling in vain against the weakness those moments of intimacy only served to increase, they soon became a purgatory, and she now saw that any attempt on her part to put a stop to them, displeased her friend, who possessed so entirely the knowledge of her secret, and knew so well how to construe her every action.

It had once been rather a relief to Giulia to feel that there was one in the world to whom she could pour forth the history of her cherished fancy; but when, by slow degrees, after the first arrival of Claud, she began to experience--as if in retribution for her former vain imaginings--the reality of love, her shame and sorrow at her own weakness, was increased by the dread of its being discovered. Nice saw it all; but far from pitying, only scorned her weak friend for the sufferings she endured.

Did she not love—yes, love, as the cold, dull heart could never love — yet she suffered not in the manner she did—she was not sad and depressed, but only the more fierce and excited !

Nice could as little understand the feelings of her friend—who weak as she might be, still possessed the softer feelings of a woman—as the strong resisting thistle, might be supposed to appreciate the shrinking of the sensitive plant, at the touch of a human hand.

“ Love—the flower which closes up for fear
When rude and selfish spirits breathe too near”

was not her's.

It was Nice's pleasure that these lessons should continue, and she therefore managed that it should be so—she was not afraid of Giulia's standing in her way ; she looked upon her as one whom Claud could never love.

Emboldened by the experienced power of her attractions upon one victim, whom she had enthralled in a few days, she thought it would

require but time, and the greater exertion of her arts to subjugate the less excitable young Englishman. Absorbed in her own schemes and interest, she had become rather less energetic in those of her uncle, and in her endeavours to further the accomplishment of his purpose, when a report reached her ears.

It was the Marchese who informed her of it, with the utmost delight painted on his countenance. It was rumoured, he said, in the fashionable world, that Lady de Crespigny was likely to be persuaded to bestow herself upon her guardian's eldest son. It was a very likely story to have been circulated—still, though Nice smiled in scorn upon the supposition, there was something in it which displeased her, and moved her to take some more active step.

She wrote to her uncle, and informed him of the report that was afloat, and recommended his immediate presence in London. She knew well what influence he possessed

over every mind, and also that the remembrance of his visit had ever retained its impression upon the mind of the Baroness. She still turned pale at the mention of his name. This advantage must not be neglected, but be made the most of.

With very different feelings another had heard the rumour. With secret satisfaction it reached Mrs. Hamilton's ears—although she knew there was little or no truth in it—as to any share at least that Claud had in the affair; so, she smilingly assured those who ventured to question her on the subject—still she was far from satisfied as to the real state of affairs.

Mrs. Hamilton was certainly a pattern to all in her situation, as a woman who lives in the world of fashion—(only to such, let it be plainly understood!) All she did, was done with such delicacy, at the same time with such skill; there was no blundering attempt to press matters before the proper time, by the use of

bare-faced, or awkwardly concealed manœuvres. She let things go quietly on their own way, with merely a gentle touch now and then, to set them in a right direction, instead of the bold, palpable moves which too often send the actors entirely off the proper line.

The mother beheld her unconscious son, as long as these reports had not reached his ears, continue his kind brotherly attentions towards the Baroness; riding—walking with her as with his sisters, and he would dance with her, or sit by her side in public.

The state of Giulia's feelings had not escaped Mrs. Hamilton's keen perceptions, and the discovery greatly encouraged her in her sanguine views. It was upon this she relied most, as a means by which to lead her son captive to her wishes---on this and his extreme affection for herself---she knew well that for her sake he had ever been ready to make any sacrifice.

But with Claud, she was aware that she

had to deal with one, who, like his father, was the very soul of honour and right feeling, to whom she must not breathe of worldly interest and consideration, if she wished not at once to scare him from this good fortune. She must not breath a word on those points, upon which she did not scruple to dilate, when speaking to her daughters; for men, she said, were so provokingly tenacious—at least, those with whom she had to deal! and truly, if there existed one, who seemed to have preserved unimpaired these principles of honour, which the world is wont so soon to tarnish, it was Mr. Hamilton.

His wife had never dared to whisper to him a hint of her present scheme. She knew that the slightest idea of design in this case would excite his disgust and displeasure.

If it were so with him—what would it be with the son, possessing as he did, all his father's opinions, or prejudices, for so Mrs. Hamilton called what in reality—although

she often found them inconvenient—she could not choose but admire. Therefore it was to no worldly point of her son's character that she could direct her aim ; rather must her energies be directed to the unselfish nature of his disposition, and the strength of her influence over his mind.

Matters however approached their crisis sooner than she had anticipated.

CHAPTER III.

"A married life, to speak the best
Is all a lottery contest ;

* * * * *
'Tis an important point to know
There's no perfection here below.

* * * * *
Man's an old compound after all,
And ever has been since the fall."

COTTON.

CLAUD HAMILTON had been at home some weeks, when one day he entered his mother's dressing-room, and threw himself on a sofa by her side.

After a few moments of silence, he exclaimed,

"Mother, I have been very much annoyed to-day!"

"Indeed—how, dear Claud, what has happened?" she enquired.

"People are such fools," he exclaimed impetuously, "such idiots, and busy bodies! I had heard before, that there was some foolish report about the Baroness and myself, but did not know that it was so generally believed."

"Georgie, dear, do not make such a noise," said Mrs. Hamilton, turning to the child, who was playing in the room; as a little feint to hide the manifestation of any too great interest in the subject thus suddenly broached.

"But I did not know, Claud," she continued, "that it had gone so far, as—"

"It is really very provoking," interrupted

Claud Hamilton, speaking rapidly, "that a man cannot be kind and attentive to a girl whom he has known from a child, without such ridiculous nonsense being circulated."

These words grated somewhat unpleasantly on Mrs. Hamilton's ears, but she said very calmly,

"And what have you heard which has so excited you?"

Claud then told his mother, that he had been congratulated upon his intended marriage, as if it had been considered a settled affair, particularly from the circumstance of Lady de Crespigny, not having appeared in public lately.

And true it was that Giulia's sick heart, now become insupportably painful, had made her shun gaiety, and remain almost entirely at home.

"Now really," Claud continued, "on my own account, I care not for this folly, but it

may reach Giulia's ears also, and then in what a very disagreeable position it would place us both, considering how we are situated; however, I took care flatly to contradict it, and begged, Lady—to spread about that I had done so; I also assured L—— how grateful I should feel, by his exerting himself in my favour, concerning this appointment, which was half promised to me—and he said he would do all he could."

"My dear Claud!" exclaimed his mother, in a tone marking how little she approved of the proceeding.

"Yea, dear mother," continued her son, imagining that it was dismay at the idea of losing him again so soon—"I consider it my duty; however reluctant I feel to the idea of being separated from you all again, after so long an absence, this is not a time to think of idling at home. In the critical state of public affairs, when my father may soon be out of office, with all the expenses attendant

on so large a family, it would indeed be a sin for me to neglect the means of attaining this lucrative situation, though it should take me to America for two years."

"America for two years!" What a blow to all Mrs. Hamilton's prospects for him!

She looked grave and thoughtful, as she sat meditating some bold stroke; the time having now arrived, when some decisive measure became imperative.

Claud endeavoured to change the subject, and to restore cheerfulness to the countenance of his fondly loved mother, over which, he never could endure for a moment, to see a cloud.

Mrs. Hamilton's determination was soon taken.

Remembering the fresh, guilelessness of her son's disposition—his openness and sincerity, she thought, that after all, the best policy, as well as the least trouble to herself, would

be, at once to be sincere and explicit—so the next moment she exclaimed—

“ My own dear Claud, I know of a scheme which would be so infinitely more agreeable and advantageous than this horrid appointment,” Mrs. Hamilton paused a moment, looking somewhat nervously, but smilingly into his face, whilst he waited all attention for her to continue. “ My dearest Claud—what is there to prevent your confirming the excellent plan, the world has so kindly chalked out for you, by wooing our young Baroness—winning her, I am sure would be no difficult task.”

Claud looked first enquiringly into his mother’s face, to ascertain whether or not she were speaking seriously, and then coloring, in a slightly offended and astonished tone, merely said,

“ My dear mother, what an absurd idea!” and turned away.

“ Why absurd, Claud ?” she answered,

arguments she knew her son would ward, and now, merely waited tunity to combat them with her prequence.

“ Dear mother,” the young man said, smiling, at the quiet manner in which the last question had been spoken; “ I speak calmly as if you were merely proposing. I should ask the Baroness to do me the honor of requesting her to become my wife; but you are only joking, mother; it won’t do.”

“ Claud, I am not joking,” she said earnestly; “ this is not a sudden proposal. You can assure you; it has long floated in my imagination, as one of my most

dared to mention the subject, had I not of late begun almost to suspect, that such a wish on my part, would not surprise or displease you very much."

"Mother, for mercy's sake, what do you mean? I am sure I have afforded you no cause for such a suspicion."

"Really, my dear boy, I cannot give you credit for possessing so small a share of the vanity inherent to your sex, as to imagine that you could have been perfectly blind to the glaring fact, of the state of the little Baroness's heart, which has been so sorely wounded by your *beaux yeux*—and when you have continued so remorselessly to deepen and widen the wound with such gentle cruelty — such kind attention — what is one to think?"

Claud coloured and looked deeply annoyed, though he tried to laugh, when, at the conclusion of the speech, he said,

“ What nonsense ! I am sure you belie
Giulia cruelly.”

“ No, indeed, Claud, your sisters will tell
you the same story—they are as well aware
of the fact as I am—and, indeed, who could
help perceiving it ? I never saw any one
look so truly miserable as poor Giulia has
done lately ; she neither eats or sleep—and,
in short, is as perfect a specimen of

‘ She never told her love,
But let concealment, &c., &c.’

as I ever beheld.”

“ If this is true, mother, it was very
wrong indeed of you, not to warn me of it
before ; God knows, I would rather have cut
off my right hand, then that this should have
happened. It is making me out, indeed a
brute, to imagine that, with the least suspi-
cion of such an idea, as you have just
suggested, I should not have acted very dif-
ferently. I have ever hitherto, almost considered
Giulia in the light of a sister,” continued

Claud, pacing the room with agitated steps; "when a cold, dull child, I used to take pleasure in being kind to her, because she was neglected by others — and she is one, who I should never have suspected of susceptibility."

"God knows, Claud! you must consider she is not your sister — nor is she a child — and remember, Etna lies beneath the snow."

"You are Job's comforter, mother — however, I do still hope that you are mistaken. I shall go down to Brighton for a few days," he added, abruptly, after Mrs. Hamilton had suffered him to pace the room hurriedly for some minutes, in order that he might digest the new ideas she had introduced into his mind.

"Do think over this business, dear," Mrs. Hamilton at length said, seriously and persuasively; "it is a matter which concerns us all so greatly; the happiness not of one, but

the welfare of so many is implicated in it — and, above all, yourself; although, I well know, that is the last person of whom you ever think."

"No, indeed, mother, this is not my intention; but rather to put a stop to this unpleasant business, before it goes any further — for even if I do not get the appointment, Giulia will be soon returning to Shirley; and I cannot persuade myself there can be anything so very serious in her feelings towards me, but what will not soon evaporate — nothing to render it incumbent on me to make such a sacrifice of myself, as to—"

"Hush, hush! dear Claud," interrupted Mrs. Hamilton, feeling how disagreeable might be the remembrance of those words some future day; "do not so hastily reject all thoughts of a step, the vital importance of which, to yourself and family, you cannot at present imagine."

“Mother!” exclaimed the young man, much agitated, “it may be as well, perhaps, to come to the point at once—which will, I am sure, settle the matter finally, and shew you the impossibility of this scheme, on which you have—I am annoyed and grieved to see—so set your mind.”

Mrs. Hamilton looked alarmed.

“I do not love Giulia,” Claud continued; “and never, for any worldly consideration, would I be so base as to marry a woman I did not love. I know what you would say, mother,” — for he guessed pretty well, the arguments she would use upon the occasion; “however, I think I am quite young enough to be allowed to wait a little longer before it is necessary for me to marry at all; certainly, I feel no inclination to hurry myself into a *mariage de convenance*—the principles of which I condemn, as much as I should dislike the affair in itself. My dear mother, if we are to be thus bartered for worldly

considerations, what becomes of our advantage over royalty, in our freedom as regards the disposal of our hearts? I am sure, if we only glance at the present wretched state of affairs in Carlton House, we ought to be thankful, that love alone need influence us, fortunate subjects—in the choice of a partner for life; if the affections of the heart are to be set aside, and expediency and interest substituted in their place, then—”

“But dearest Claud,” interrupted Mrs. Hamilton faintly, “there is at least love on one side, and it would be different if you had ever conceived any other attachment;” and she looked with half timid enquiry into her son’s face.

“Oh, you want to dive into my secrets,” Claud said laughingly; “but you may set your mind at ease on that point, mother mine! My heart has never yet received any severe wounds—only very harmless injuries from the dark eyes of the Spanish ladies; but it is my

dream of joy, that some day I may meet with a fair one, as much like my beautiful mother as possible," and he kissed her affectionately, "one who I may be able to love, and who will return my love. Well Georgie, I hope," he continued rising as if the conversation were at an end, "I hope you are edified by my discourse;" for the child, having been obliged to cease his noisy game, had remained crossed legged on the sofa, beguiling the time by brandishing his whip, and listening most attentively to the dialogue going on between his mother and Claud.

A little play now followed between the brothers—and then Claud glanced at his mother; she sat silent—looking most unfeignedly dejected and crest fallen.

It may seem that Mrs. Hamilton had made less use of her powers of rhetoric and persuasion, than might have been expected from the ardent interest she felt in the cause; but the fact was, that the straightforward, undisguised

manner in which her son treated the proposal, seemed to put to shame the worldly feelings of the mother's heart. She looked upon her noble son, inwardly gloried in his generous sentiments, and the truth of all he said came home to her heart. It would indeed be a sacrifice, for one so young—so good—so noble—so truly formed for the heart's purest affections, for ever to shut up their source by the seal of a cold, calculating marriage.

Mrs. Hamilton felt this, and she lost all courage to bring forth the flash of eloquence and rhetoric, she had prepared; but at the same time, she felt only deeper disappointment and mortification at the sight of her darling vision melting into air—and at feeling that she herself was losing strength, though (alas! alas! for degenerate human nature) not inclination to support her scheme.

Mrs. Hamilton knew not at that moment how much more this passive resignation, (for which she deeply blamed herself) tended to the success

of her wishes, than would have done the most determined and skilful perseverance. If she had continued her worldly entreaties and arguments, Claud would have been perhaps only the more confirmed in his view of the matter. But he could not bear to witness the subdued and disappointed air of the mother whom he almost idolized—who had ever been his *beau ideal* of perfection in a woman.

Placing himself therefore again by her side as she sat—her eyes fixed on the ground, he said, taking her hand affectionately within his ;

“ Do not look so grave, dear mother; tell me what makes you so anxious about this most extraordinary plan ?”

Mrs. Hamilton lifted up her head, with a brightened expression.

“ Claud,” she exclaimed, “ I am sure you know your mother too well to think, that for her own selfish gratification alone, she would urge upon you anything against which your heart rebels ; truly would every advantage it

affords be cancelled, if accompanied by repugnance on your part. My darling son, I only ask you not to be rash, not to reject without due consideration, a prospect, which one day you may repent having so precipitately, I may add, so weakly, disregarded. My dear boy, only view the subject in its proper light. Here is a young Baroness—no brilliant beauty I confess!—but at the same time no fright; and look round and tell me, where is the domestic happiness, solely depending on the possession of loveliness?—This young Peeress is talented, amiable, for I am certain that Giulia conceals, under a somewhat reserved deportment, intrinsic merit, which drawn forth by the happiness and affection of domestic life, are what any man might be proud of. Well then, amiable and clever we know she is, and above all—and this is the greatest recommendation in my eyes—she has the taste and heart to love with pure disinterestedness

my own dear son." Tears started to the mother's eyes, and were soon rolling down her cheeks.

Claud sat mute and motionless, and looked pale and agitated.

"Oh, Claud," Mrs. Hamilton continued, "you will be disappointed if in this cold and bitter world, you expect to find many instances of such a love—a love like hers—poor Giulia's! it is a rare and precious gem, reject not thus heedlessly, that which you may never find again. This is the state of the case, Claud; what has it to do with any private mercenary considerations on your part? and with regard to others—"

"But, mother, I love her not," groaned poor Claud.

"Not at this moment, perhaps," replied Mrs. Hamilton, "but you have never tried to do so; and," she continued in a voice of agitated earnestness, which had in it a slight shade of

reproach, " it is all very well, dear Claud, to talk of feeling and inclination; it would indeed be delightful if we could think alone of indulging every impulse, but we cannot unfortunately live entirely for ourselves—forget all interest—all happiness but our own. Claud, to come to the truth without further discussion, you know we are far from rich; we live, in consequence of the position in society we are obliged to maintain, far above our income. Just now our circumstances are peculiarly difficult. Henry's Sandhurst's education — Archie just gone to an expensive school—the governess—your elder sisters, who cost not a little just now, requiring as they do so much dress, &c., &c., during this London season. Perhaps you will say we ought to do less, but you know your father would rather starve himself, than see one of his children deprived of any advantage which might benefit them; and God knows," and her eyes filled with tears, " this is not from any worldly

pride it springs from his indulgent, affectionate, unselfish heart. At this present time," Mrs. Hamilton continued, "I know he is much harassed by pressing money matters—you have remarked that you did not think your father was in particularly good spirits. I understand every shade of his countenance, every tone of his dear voice, and know, that under all his seeming cheerfulness when among us, he is far from himself. I almost fancy he looks ten years older within these last few weeks," and Mrs. Hamilton's countenance shewed plainly the genuine emotions, which even worldliness had never for a moment diminished—feelings of anxious devoted love for her husband !

Claud sat leaning his head upon his hands and was still silent.

" Dear Claud," his mother continued, in a voice of unfeigned emotion, " you must forgive me if I seem to overlook in the slightest degree your feelings, in pressing the consider-

ation of this affair upon you, but it is a stake of such vital importance, for not only is your own welfare, but the happiness and prosperity of so many concerned in it. Oh! what a relief would it be to your father's mind, to feel that you, at least, were well provided for—such a thing for you—for your sisters—indeed for all!"

Again she paused, and laid her soft hand caressingly on his. Claud lifted up his head, arose looking very grave and very pale, said it was time to dress, and spoke a few careless words to one of his sisters, who entered the room at that moment.

And this is not an exaggerated picture, of the manner in which many a marriage is arranged! Sad to say, it is an over true one. We fear that if there was, a behind the scenes, in nine cases out of ten, where a listener might hear the discussions which generally take

place before a marrige is settled, they would be convinced that we paint from life. Yes, it may be a melancholy idea, but so it is, that many an ardent and free young spirit is talked --yes, literally talked into marriage--

Many a young creature whose hopes of happiness in the married state are high, who has panted for the joys of companionship with an idol of its fancy—all perfect—all delightful—has this dream of years, at once remorselessly overthrown—another's or father's hand destroying the beautiful fabric by some plan of prudence, and without a pang is the beautiful edifice demolished; for parents think only of the substance, and have outlived all remembrance of the shadow, which perhaps they once cherished also in their young and unworldly days. And there is always a weapon which parents can wield for the purpose desired—some tender chord to harp upon—if the victims are callous to their own interest, there is always a *corps de reserve*; some

touching of feelings—some relationship—some working upon the generous ductile heart of youth. All this is fact—not fiction. Marriages are oftener than people imagine---*mariages de convenance*—and instead of wondering that there are so many unhappy wedded pairs, the marvel in our opinion is, that there are so many happy ones. We speak not in reproof, but in sorrow, for the infirmity of human nature; for so it is with all alike, and so we know it will be, as long as the business continues, of marrying, and giving in marriage. After all, though there are very few marriages made in these our days, according to the dictates of nature, perhaps it is as well; for many of what are called *love matches*, are for the most part sorry concerns, generally turning out mixtures of poverty, disappointment—of times, misery!

Claud Hamilton dined at Carlton House that evening. The Hamiltons were great favourites of the Regent. Almost immedi-

ately upon entering the Royal presence, he was startled by his august host addressing him, with that degree of interest in the affairs of others, which he so peculiarly possessed.

“ Well, Sir, when is it to be ? come, don’t deny it---never let such an opportunity slip---a capital stroke for you—I put it into your mother’s head the first night of your arrival ; I shall expect to hear before long that it is all settled—” and the Prince passed on.

Poor Claud ! he thought all the world had conspired against him—even he who was himself suffering annoyances and heartburnings, from his own sad specimen of a *mariage de convenance*.

CHAPTER IV.

" I would not pry into thy secret soul ;
But if these things be sooth, there still is time
For penitence and pity ; reconcile thee
With the true church, and through the church to Heaven."

BYRON'S MANFRED.

How happily unconscious was Giulia the next morning, when she heard that Claud was going to Brighton for a few days, that she was in any way connected with his departure, for he altered not his sudden determination to leave London.

She heard the intelligence unmoved ; her love was then of that hopeless, crushing kind, which renders the heart insensible either to pleasure or pain, in the presence or absence of its object.

But had she known all, what agony and shame would have been her portion ! As it was, even when Claud entered the drawing-room to take leave, she merely felt her heart beat quicker.

He had bid adieu to his sisters--to his mother, who had avoided another private interview with her son, and now, as he approached the Baroness, she turned away to avoid the appearance of observing him.

Claud advanced towards Giulia, and his feelings were most uncomfortable as he did so. He had not seen her since his conversation with his mother—he scarcely dared to look at her, or speak, lest his voice should appear changed—he put out his hand, with a hasty gaze at her countenance, and she gave hers

in silence too—it was cold, but trembled not in his grasp.

Her face was very pale, her expression of that fixed and joyless cast, which he had remarked of late, but considered only as the demonstration of the gloomy character of her childhood. But now the quiet, hopeless, dejection of her demeanour touched his heart; he viewed it under a new light.

There are few, if any, whose vanity (if not other feelings) is not somewhat pleasingly touched, by the idea of being loved; and though Claud possessed as little as possible of this predisposition—which begging their pardon, is generally more largely developed in his own sex, than in that of the other—we will not say that it was not a little gratified vanity, mingling with the milk of human kindness—with which his heart over-flowed—that caused it to soften, as the thought passed through his mind, that Giulia loved him, loved him too

with that unobtrusive, modest love, which could excite no repellent feeling in his breast, but rather fill it with gratitude—with pity!—*Pity!*—when a man begins to pity---truly he is not far from a warmer feeling.

Claud pressed her cold hand which returned not his pressure—a slight shade of colour alone demonstrating that she noticed it. But ah! she did indeed feel it, and felt as it were, the sun-beam of the glance which accompanied it.

“ But 'twas a gleam—a fairy gleam
Which soon had passed away,
Like that which on a wintry morn
Doth brighten all as May—
For one brief moment—then 'tis gone
And all seems still more drear—
So her poor dark, and lonely heart
More desolate did appear.”

Giulia paid her usual visit to Mivart's that day. She was shewn into the sitting room, where she generally held her confidential interviews with her friend, and where she had lately found the young Marchese, whose presence was

almost a relief, now that her mind was burdened with a feeling which she shrunk from having scrutinized, by the keen eyes even of her bosom friend. But this day the apartment was unoccupied on her entrance, even by Nice --and she sat for some time alone in a state of dreamy stupor, into which--when the presence of others did not rouse her to some exertion--she now generally sank.

At length a sound met her ears--the closing of the door! She slowly lifted up her eyes. They wandered at first with a sort of bewildered expression, over the dark figure of a man, who stood before her, whilst a voice stern, though musical, murmured over her a blessing.

It was Fra Paolo.

Giulia arose, a kind of mysterious awe stealing into her breast, as his identity darted upon her perception.

The Priest fixed his penetrating glance upon her, and after a moment's silence he spoke--

"Lady de Crespigny, I rejoice to see once more, her for whose soul's welfare I have wept—and prayed—and chastened myself with fasting and penance. May I find that my prayers and stripes have not been unavailing; that the craftiness of man, and the art with which they lie in wait to deceive weak mortals, has not been permitted to prevail against you; but that the saints and Holy Virgin watching over my daughter, have preserved safe to her, the treasure of her departed mother's faith—the only true faith by which she can be saved. Though its profession may have been hidden in the heart, from the eyes of those, who would fain wrest it from you; yet I pray that it is still there—uncorrupted—and ready to be shewn forth boldly—when the truth and honour of our Holy Mother Church requires it. Daughter, is it so?" and he fixed a stern penetrating glance upon the pale countenance of Giulia.

Religion can assume no very strong and

palpable form in a mind distempered or ill-regulated. The heart, after vain shadows,

"Disquieting itself in vain,"

starts aloof from that pure, calm voice, which offers to the earthly mind, no

"Fairy gleam—no rapture high!"

In Giulia's case, the influence which the subtle Priest, in his visit to Shirley had acquired over her mind, had never entirely lost its power; nor associated with him, the impression of a religion which he had presented in so imposing and exciting a manner to her young imagination.

Still this had been much confused with the purity and truth of the doctrines with which her aunt had subsequently striven to imbue her mind; but the fact of living, as she had done

latterly so much with the world, and the people of the world, had dimmed more than ever, the ideas of truth in her mind, and weakened its power over her heart.

Sometimes, when her soul yearned with an undefined longing for that peace which the world cannot give, the gracious words.

“Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,” sounded in her ear; and her spirit, as it were, struggled to fly to Him, who called it with such gracious words.

But there was not faith to lead her spiritual eyes to discern, *who* would have given her rest, and she would then strive to prostrate herself in imagination before the golden crucifix, and the pictured form of the meek Virgin—as once before she had knelt in her mother’s chamber.

But from these images her heart ascended

not to Him, to whom the worshippers of idols profess to lead their followers; it rather descended to the creature with which these emblems were associated; and with a mysterious awe, how different to the feeling with which the meek disciple of Christ strives to inspire those he would lead to his master's love, Giulia would remember the solemn mien of the priest, all the solemnity and mystery with which the thoughts of that dark man were connected; and she would lose sight of the Creator in the idea of the proud, usurping *creature*.

And now he stood once more before her, in all the saintly dignity of deportment he could so well assume; so particularly striking to one, living as she had done, so long amongst the light and earthly-minded—amongst those to whom outward sanctity was unknown—crushed, burdened as she had felt before with a sorrow from which, she could not seek

relief, through the pity or sympathy of her equals. Pride seemed to vanish before the surprise—the awe of his superior presence : --- she sunk on her knces at his feet murmuring,

“ Father, I know not, I know nothing, but that I am weak, and sinful, and miserable --- weary of the world, of myself. Oh! give me —give me peace !”

A smile illuminated the countenance of the priest; not the smile, alas! with which angels cheer the worn soul, who

“ Faint with its short flights and flutterings,
Would seek a refuge in its parent breast.”

but the smile of one who sees before him, weak, irresolute—smarting under the stings of vexation and disappointment, a ready victim to human influence and power.

The priest took a crucifix from his breast, and pressed it to her lips.

"Here—here, there is peace!" he murmured, "on this, my daughter, fix your gaze, whilst in humble penitence, you pour forth your sins and weaknesses before me. I will absolve you from their guilt. Only believe, and peace will enter your soul."

Giulia paused. Alas! it was but earthly feelings which prompted her hesitation, ere she thus acknowledged herself separate from that faith, which receives remission of sins from God alone.

Was she to be separated from the communion of him she loved—was she to declare herself one of that religion, of which he had professed his abhorrence?

"Father," she faltered, "forgive me—not now!"

Fra Paolo did not press the point, but raising her from the ground, led her to a seat—and Nice, at that moment, entered with the

humble deportment—which, of late, she had somewhat laid aside—and seated herself by Giulia's side.

The agitation of this interview, had, as it were, burst the bands which had confined her pent up feelings, and a torrent of tears relieved her over-charged heart—under whose softening influence, her heart lent itself passively to the power which the priest failed not to exert, to enthrall her unstable soul.

Before the departure of the Baroness, the young Marchese, under the commanding sway of Fra Paolo's orders, entered the room with a sullen, downcast air.

The priest took Giulia's hand, and placing it within that of the young man, said in a solemn tone,

“ My children, on your united efforts in her service, the Holy Mother Church has built many hopes. I exhort you to love one another.”

Giulia, unconscious of his real meaning,

Giulia departed with the chain of power fastened to her mind; which, a day successively for the next week, peated her interviews with the pries more and more around her morbid ima The power of love and priestcraft, w contending for mastery. Never was in such a state of perplexity as poor But a crisis was at hand.

The weak body cannot long sur moved the tumult of the mind within when Giulia was beginning to gaze affright, for rescue from the power a lectual superiority of the tempter, priest's startling designs had been grad vealed to her perception—of which,

heart shrunk with loathing, illness came to her relief, and she sunk languid and exhausted on a bed of suffering, entirely brought on by nervous excitement.

CHAPTER V

" Now, I see
The mystery of your loneliness,
Your salt tears head. * +
* * *
+ + Then, I confess,
Here on my knee, before high heav
That before you, and next unto hig
I love your son. * + *
All's Well Th.

In the meantime, Mrs. Hamilton
to do all in her power to help ..

quently—a channel of communication, she deemed, perhaps, even more favorable to such a purpose, than any further attempts at personal influence to forward the case—for she could pour forth on paper, pathetic appeals to his affectionate heart, and trust to the softening power which absence ever possesses, to heighten and enhance their effect upon a son, as devoted as was Claud Hamilton.

His mother, dwelt too—and she could do so with truth—on the increasing inroads which her unfortunate attachmept was effecting upon Giulia's health and spirits, and she now wrote to say, that the poor, dear girl, was absolutely confined to her bed by an attack of nervous debility. It must be allowed, that it was with something like triumph at her heart, that she made the communication; and, whilst with the care and tenderness of a mother, she nursed the invalid, she could scarcely regret an indisposition which might tend, not only as an assistance in the fulfilment of her own wishes, but

afford an effectual cure to the malady which was consuming the energies of her young friend.

Claud Hamilton also wrote to his mother, but briefly ; he but once touched upon the matter so interesting to her, and that was in a manner rather puzzling and incomprehensible.

" There is no occasion, dear mother," he said, " to dwell so much upon this subject. I think it was sufficiently discussed in our interview before my departure ; for the present, spare your pretty fingers all the trouble you give them concerning it."

The letter received, after he had heard of Giulia's illness, was addressed to Annie. Many kind expressions of regret were expressed in it, and almost affectionate messages to the poor sufferer. It also contained an intimation of his having fixed his return for the Friday following.

" Do not however let me disturb Seymour,"

he added, alluding to a young Clergyman, a friend, who was occupying his apartment during his absence. "I can easily get a room at an hotel, and it would be a pity to put him to the expense of going into lodgings."

Mrs. Hamilton took the letter, and went with it to Giulia's bed-side. She held another in her hand—it was from Mrs. Gordon.

When burdened by sorrow or depression, and all seems dark around us, we oftentimes feel a longing desire for the presence of those who are not of this world. The worldly may be as outwardly kind and affectionate in their sympathy and efforts to soothe, but the diseased heart requires the aid of one, who is the disciple of Him, "who beareth our sicknesses, and healeth our infirmities." And thus when Giulia's friends pressed around her during her illness, her thoughts turned yearningly to the gentle being, whose maternal tenderness she had never sufficiently prized when it was offered, nor heeded her counsels; which, had

she followed, might have strengthened her mind, and the misery and weakness from which she now suffered, have been thence avoided.

"Aunt Gordon—dear aunt Gordon!" was the exclamation, which now faintly escaped her lips.

Her kind guardian happened to be in the room, when it was uttered. Mrs. Hamilton had hinted to him her suspicions of the cause of Giulia's illness, as a preparation for what she hoped would follow, and although it was rather difficult to make him understand such excessive susceptibility in one he had always considered as not of the melting order, the knowledge of her feelings added greatly to the kind anxiety with which he proceeded to make a hasty visit to his ward, before leaving the house for the business of the day; and on hearing these words sighed forth he said, soothingly,

"Well, dear Giulia, we will send for Mrs.

Gordon to see you, a little trip will do her good."

Before he went abroad that morning, Mr. Hamilton accordingly wrote a few lines, informing the aunt of her niece's illness, and urging her to pay them a visit. Mrs. Hamilton made no objection to this plan, but at the same time felt that the unworldly, single-mindedness of the good lady would be rather *mal à propos* just then, when plots and intrigues were thickening around.

But in her hand she held the answer.

"I have brought you some most agreeable medicine, Giulia," Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed with a cheerful voice, as she stood all smiles by the bed-side. "Here is a letter from your aunt; she will be here to-day."

"To-day!" Giulia exclaimed with some eagerness.

"Yes, and not only your aunt; she proposes bringing with her your dear little

sister Francesca ; she requires a visit to the dentist, or some such pleasant thing ; and your good aunt, who has till now been so jealous of allowing our London smoke to breathe upon this beautiful flower, of whom we have heard so much, and who we are all so dying to see, has at length made up her mind to expose her to its pollution for the sake of her pretty teeth. Are you not delighted, dear Giulia ? And Claud, he will be back on Friday ; how glad he will be to see the little thing ! ”

Giulia’s brow contracted with a movement as if of pain. After a slight pause she murmured—

“ I think it is hardly worth while bringing her so long a journey, for I—I must return to Shirley Hall in a very few days—indeed as soon as my aunt has rested after her journey.”

“ Leave us, dear Giulia ? Oh, no indeed, we cannot allow that---but here, I have another

letter, with something in it for you," and Mrs. Hamilton read to Giulia those parts of Claud's epistle relating to herself. An hysterical sob from the young girl as she lay, her face buried in the pillow, was her only comment.

Mrs. Hamilton took the cold hand which was convulsively pressing the coverlet, in the endeavour to restrain her emotion.

" You will not go and leave us, Giulia," she said again.

" Oh yes---oh yes," was the gasping reply.

" No, Giulia, my own dear daughter; Claud will never allow that just now."

" Daughter! Claud!"

Giulia sprang up, and gazed wildly around on Mrs. Hamilton.

" What, what," she faltered, " do you mean?" and then covered with confusion, as if fearful of having betrayed her secret, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed out,

" Leave me, leave me."

"No, dearest Giulia, do not send me from you, nor seek to hide from me, that which only makes me love and admire you, and causes me, for Claud's sake, to rejoice. Why be ashamed of a feeling so pure and beautiful? Why should you not love Claud, when he loves you?"

"Loves me," Giulia murmured, "oh no!"

"Yes, my love; why should there be any longer concealment between us? It is for me to be the interpreter of my son's feelings towards you, and for his sake, and mine, if not for your own, I must implore you, dear Giulia, not, from the impulse of any false pride, to dash for ever the dear hopes I have formed for him. Forgive me, Giulia, I would not have presumed to speak thus openly on a subject so delicate, had I not dared to hope, that not only my son's interest but your own happiness was also implicated." Pride! oh her heart was too softened for pride--too weak to

spurn as flattering and illusive words which came to her ear,

"Like the sweet south
That breathes upon a bed of violets,
Stealing and giving odour,"

suffusing hope!—and hope alone was bliss to her desponding heart. She fell upon Mrs. Hamilton's bosom, and weeping soft relieving tears, tacitly consented to the reception of the truth of all that she had said—whilst Mrs. Hamilton, feeling now that she had indeed gone too far to stop short, continued to pour into Giulia's delighted ear, words which made the dark world seem to pass away, and a Paradise of brightness to open before her eyes. She heard that even her union with the idol of her heart, had not been unthought of—that it had been spoken of by him. She heard of his sentiments and scruples upon the subject of a marriage, which might in the eyes of the world seem mercenary—his horror of such an idea!

She heard all that could give her hope, and fill her heart with new and delightful thoughts.— She remembered she had the power not only of conferring domestic happiness, but worldly benefits on him she loved so well, bestowing all she possessed so freely and joyfully upon him. She heard all, every little detail into which Mrs. Hamilton could diffuse a shade of truth, to make up for the false gilding with which her communications were forced to be surrounded, she heard all but the words—

“Mother, I love her not!”

But in the midst of this bliss, a somewhat startling interruption took place. Mrs. Hamilton had for some time been scanning anxiously an object which had caught her quick eye—it was a small crucifix suspended round Giulia's neck and which, in her agitation, she had allowed to escape from her bosom. By degrees, unpleasant suspicions had begun to suggest themselves to her mind, which at length broke forth into the exclamation of—

" My dear Giulia, tell me, ~~why~~ do you wear that crucifix ?"

Giulia started violently, and grew dreadfully pale.

" You have no leaning towards Roman Catholicism I hope, my dear child," she continued seriously, " I trust not indeed; that would be a downfall to all our happiness. I have often heard Claud declare that he would never marry one who differed in religion from himself, and against the Roman Catholic faith, he has a decided prejudice. Tell me Giulia, that my suspicions are unwarrantable; I trust you have not allowed your Italian friend, in any way to tamper with your religious feelings, for if that be the case—"

" Oh, no, no !" interrupted the Baroness " I will tell you all, dear Mrs. Hamilton." And to one who held as it were, the key of her most treasured secret, it required little effort to draw from the agitated girl, the whole history of the priestly influence, under which she had

lately been existing. Mrs. Hamilton was shocked and disgusted by the detail of this crafty plot, but Giulia's shame and agitation restrained in a measure her expressions of indignation, and she acceded to her ardent prayer, that the affair might be kept secret —divulged to no other ear. With tears Giulia assured Mrs. Hamilton that alas! her heart was too much weighed down, beneath the load of earthly feelings, to be in a state to allow any particular tenets, to hold vital influence over it, and as if to illustrate the truth of this assertion, Giulia unfastened the crucifix from her neck, and placed it in Mrs. Hamilton's hand. At that moment a note was presented to her from Nice, and she turned somewhat pale, when her eyes fell upon the hand-writing.

Several notes had arrived from the Italian girl since Giulia's illness, imploring permission to be allowed to come to her and watch over her: but these had been answered by

Mrs Hamilton, saying that as the most perfect quiet had been ordered for the invalid, and Lady de Crespigny had already so many nurses to attend upon her, Mrs. Hamilton must beg she would postpone her visit until the Baroness was somewhat recovered—Mrs. Hamilton had ever mistrusted the Italian girl. Giulia was too ill to have the slightest energy to combat these proceedings, even had she felt any inclination to do so; but now she glanced over an epistle, filled with all the protestations of that passionate tenderness, with which the Italian language is so abundantly supplied—painting in glowing colours, the agony of mind she endured, at being debarred from administering to her friend those tender cares, it had once been her pleasure, that she should bestow upon her; Giulia's heart smote her, and the Italian's influence over her mind, was again exerting its mysterious force. With deep but timid earnestness, she entreated Mrs. Hamilton to allow Nice to visit her.

" You need not fear," she said, glancing at the crucifix, " and with truth I can assure you, that never has Nice taken any part in influencing me on the subject of religion."

If Mrs. Hamilton had not thought that, for the present, she had taken upon herself a greater degree of authority over her future daughter, than the state of affairs justified, she would have gone still further—have ventured to warn her, that perhaps a *bosom friend* might form as dangerous a foe to her matrimonial prospects, as a difference in religion, and have urged her to begin by degrees to wean herself from an incubus so distasteful to a lover. But for the present Mrs. Hamilton abstained from any further interference, and gave a reluctant consent to admit the Italian girl; however, first coming to an understanding with Giulia that all that had passed between them that day should be a sealed subject.

Ere long the friends were reunited, and

Nice was still seated by Giulia's side, when a light young form bounded into the room, and a sister's arms were thrown round her neck, and a sister's sweet voice sounded in joyous accents on her ear.

CHAPTER VI.

“ The flash of that dilating eye
Reveals too much of times gone by,
Though varying, indistinct its hue,
Oft will her glance the gazer rue,
For in it lurks that nameless spell
Which speaks, itself unspeakable
A spirit yet unquell'd and high,
That claims and keeps ascendancy.”

. This

ALL was light and brilliance in the
Dantman Square the Friday night. ¶

which although rather late in the season, was numerously attended by all the *élite* who had remained in London.

At first, however—though with her wonted grace and affability, she performed the honours of the evening—the fair hostess's countenance, to those who understood its variations, gave tokens that she was suffering from some inward anxiety which robbed her of the pleasure of the moment.

Her cheek was flushed—her dark eye turned to the door at every fresh entrance, as if expecting the arrival of some distinguished guest, without whose presence the entertainment would not be complete; some even whispered that the Regent was expected.

But at length, those who had watched Mrs. Hamilton's movements, might have seen a start of pleasure, a lighting up of her eyes—her face redolent with smiles—as she hurried forwards towards the door, to greet a newly arrived guest.

It was, however, her son, Claud Hamilton ! He had only returned to London late that evening, and as he was going to occupy an apartment at an hotel, had not yet been seen by any of his family—indeed his mother did not know that he had arrived.

Claud Hamilton was a great favourite with all, old and young, and his progress from the door was at first much impeded by those who pressed round to greet him ; but he appeared graver than was his wont, and seemed to avoid meeting the anxiously scrutinizing gaze of his mother, who stood amidst the cluster of persons surrounding him—and who, though with seeming carelessness, she joined in the conversation, was evidently watching the expression of his face.

But at length his view across the room was unimpeded, and—the dancers having also just dispersed at the conclusion of a quadrille—for a moment he cast his eye upon a little group opposite—without seeming to observe

the nervous glance with which Mrs. Hamilton would have also directed him to the spot—and then he quietly approached it.

There Giulia was seated, dressed rather à *l'invalid*e—a costume, certainly not always becoming. However, the deep red, India shawl in which she was enveloped, was not unsuited to her complexion, and a circle of the de Crespigny diamonds shone brightly in her dark hair.

The young Baroness had never looked so well; she was evidently thinner from the effects of the mental and bodily ailments, from which she had been suffering; but her usually pale cheeks were rather flushed, the red glow lending its aid to increase the brightness, mingled however, with somewhat of languor, with which her serious eyes were lighted up. Her countenance too, bore no trace of its usual gloomy abstraction—it was that of one, who has been suddenly relieved of some torturing anxiety by a ray of bright hope—

"Hope that thrills so keen
Along each bounding vein."

one drop of which is sufficient to intoxicate the weakened spirit, which in the new delight, scarcely desires greater bliss ; for if, as it sometime chanceth—from the height—

"Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection, do we sink as low."

and in the reverse---from the depths of dejection, we are often as suddenly lifted to the height of joy--joy alas ! often doomed to sink again as quickly.

Many eyes were turned on the striking figure which stood at the Baroness's side. It was the Italian girl, her tall form erected to its full height, her eyes bent humbly downwards, then suddenly raised when any sound without reached her ear, with an eager glance in which the fierce glare of the tiger watching for its prey, could scarcely be restrained.

Nice was dressed with her usual simplicity, in white, but adorned on this occasion with the costly pearls, that day received from her friend, as a birth-day gift. A chain and cross of pearls, hung round her neck, and a string of the same, twined round her jetty hair.

These Giulia with her own hand, had placed upon the girl, on their descending together to the ball-room, for Nice had arrived early in Portman Square, and had repaired to Lady de Crespigny's apartment which she was also to share with her that night.

Mrs. Hamilton's consent to this proposal had been wrung from her, by Giulia's earnest entreaties, in order that Nice might not be forced to go away, at the early hour, at which she would have been otherwise obliged to accompany the sickly Marchesa, who with her son was at the ball that night.

Mrs. Hamilton had no tangible reason which she could use as a pretext for not including the Marchese from this entertainment—and di

Lante shewed no symptom of furthering by his assistance the scheme of Fra Paolo, for he seemed carefully to avoid all proximity to the Baroness.

The eyes of the dark Italian, might however have been seen stealthily watching every look and movement of her companion, but when their eyes did meet, she returned his impassioned unpleasing gaze with one of impatient scorn.

It was indeed curious to watch the two girls when they first became aware of Claud's proximity, to behold the different effect which the passion of love wrought upon the different temperaments. The one with her features kindling, as with the reflection of some hidden fire, drawing herself up higher and higher, as if she would have seen above the heads of those who hid him from her sight—whilst Giulia, her head bent down upon her bosom, with closed eyes, and suspended breath, seemed as if she awaited a moment which was to decide her fate for ever.

Notwithstanding these overpowering emotions, she must have called to her aid, the strength and dignity of a woman's pride, for when Claud stood before her, though her heart might flutter high within her breast, she was enabled to meet him with a smile tolerably composed, and with words of greeting, not too tremulously uttered.

And Claud! was it that he had suddenly made up his mind to fulfil his mother's suggestion, and try to love her, or that something in her present manner and appearance interested his feelings, and touched his heart? Perhaps he contrasted with the bold, passionate glance with which he was received by the Italian girl, the womanly dignity that prompted the young Baroness to conceal the sentiments which he had been told she entertained towards him; whatever might have been his inward feelings they certainly had the effect of causing him to turn to her with a sensation of relief.

He was soon seated by her side, gazing kindly into her shrinking eyes—speaking to her in tones, which her fluttering heart now ventured to believe, expressed feelings which in a measure answered to those which beat so warmly in her own breast.

And Nice! for one moment she stood by their side—another glance she cast on Claud, but oh! how different in its character from the last—and then she glided away to a little distance; and whilst the Marchese crept to her side, inattentive to his silent looks of passion, she watched the pair with feelings, no faint index perhaps of those, with which the great enemy of mankind, once gazed upon the happiness of the inhabitants of paradise. For

“ Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.”

and had she not beheld scorn on the countenance of Claud, as he turned from her to smile on her dull, unlovely friend?

Were then worldliness and ambition to conquer—and the strength of beauty and passion to fail? For love! it *could not be* love which warmed his heart towards the dull, passionless thing by whom he now sat; and as the supposition that so it might be, rushed like a flame of fire to her heart—

“ Each passion dimmed her face
Thrice changed with pale ire, envy, and despair.”

So dreadful was the expression of her countenance, that he, whose eyes were fixed upon it, trembled at its appearance.

But the next moment, she remembered herself,

“ Each perturbation smoothed with outward calm.”

and soon a fierce expression of joy illumined her face—for lo! the “ Paradise of fools,” as with an inward smile of scorn, she termed it

— she saw was about to be disturbed, and in as effectual a manner as if her own hand had forged the thunderbolt which was to scatter the new born happiness of her friend.

CHAPTER VII.

" Band of living Flowers ! O taintless wreath,
* * * * *
O sweet unfolding buds' that blush and breathe
Of innocence and love ! I scarce may dare
To gaze upon ! What soft gleams of hair !
What peaceful foreheads ! and what heavenly eyes !
Bosoms so sweet will never harbour care ;
Such spiritual breath was never made for sighs !
For you still breathe on Earth the gales of Paradise."

WILSON.

THE ball-room had become nearly empty, most of the throng having gone to supper, or dispersed in the anti-rooms. Nice still sat in the recess, the Marchese with downcast looks.

by her side ; Giulia and Claud also occupied the same seat, when suddenly a door leading into another apartment was thrown open---a burst of fairy-like merriment resounded, and the next moment, there tripped into the room, a train of children.

“ Like Angels sent by Spring—to usher in the Year.”

Never is the sight of these joyous innocent beings so refreshing to the eyes and heart, as when they appear like natural flowers amidst the forced and sickly scented exotics of a green-house---the brows unruffled by passion--undimmed by sorrows, or sin ; for although sin, alas ! may---nay ! must be there, its power yet sleeps---unawakened by the world’s exciting contact. Relics they seem of human loveliness---such as graced Paradise.—

“ Cheerful and unchanged.”

In the midst of a fallen world, stained with fear and strife, rise with storms and evil and passions.

This was a group of especial beauty, com-

posed of the younger Hamiltons, and several other children; those fairest specimens of the flowers of the world, with their free and proudly graceful forms--their flowing curls--their bright open countenances.

No eye could fail to turn to gaze upon this beautiful cluster--no tongue to express its admiration; and as Claud and Giulia beheld the joyous train they both uttered an exclamation of admiring pleasure at the sight.

But there was one among them, who seemed to be the Queen Bee of the group, for all strove to press forward, in order to gain the nearest place by her side, every eye to seek a glance of hers, to light up still further joy and glee in their young hearts.

There was something about the little girl, different from the others altogether—not only because her hair fell in jet like showers amongst their golden looks, but because in her cheek, there was less of the bright carnation which flushed theirs. It was tinted with the hue,

with which marble is sometimes tinged; and which, we may have seen chosen, in consequence— as giving more the appearance of life— by some of the great masters, for the sculpture of the human form.

There was a nameless, but distinctive charm in her air and gesture—something so wildly beautiful in her dark eyes, and bounding form, as holding one of the youngest children in each hand, she sprung suddenly forward, as if in playful defiance, endeavouring to escape from her other importunate playfellows!

She was not tall, and her form as child-like as that of some of her companions—although she was the eldest of the little party—and in her face, might be seen mingling beautifully with the innocent, careless mirth of childhood—the sweetness of girlhood's dawning thought and feeling.

The young girl was dressed with greater simplicity than any of the rest; no ornament

was added to her white muslin frock, save one little piece of vanity alone—a carnation-colored ribbon snood—such as at that time began to be worn, confining her hair, and tied in a bow on one side, shewing that some vain nurse or mother, had thought it necessary to add an iota to her beauty, by outward adorning.

The little procession had thus reached the centre of the room. The leader now paused. She had caught sight of the occupants of the apartment; her eye wandered over Giulia and Claud; she stood for a few moments, as if wavering between a feeling of frank confidence, which led her to approach them, and some slight restraining timidity — perhaps caused by the words of admiration which caught her ear. All this, from the first opening of the door had passed in a moment: and, immediately after Claud's exclamation, at first sight of the pretty group, another more energetic had burst from his lips; his eyes at

the same time, fixing themselves upon the object of his admiration.

“ How beautiful ! how charmingly beautiful ! What is she ? Who is she ? ”

The answer came in a voice, deep and knell like.

“ It is my sister, Francesca ! ”

“ Francesca ! how excessively stupid of me ! ” and in another moment, Claud had risen, with extended hands, he hastily approached the little girl, and took hers in both his, saying, as he looked with glad and warm affection in his face—

“ What ! my friend, Francesca ! my little wife, and I not to know her at first. To think you were in the house, and not to have seen you before ; and do you remember me—Claud Hamilton, with whom you used to have such sport, and who you loved as well as he loved you ? Ah ! I hope you have not quite forgotten him.”

“ Oh, no ! ” she answered freely, and her

sweet eyes brightened with animation, as she lifted them towards him—"Oh, no! I have not forgotten you."

The other children pressed around to witness the meeting, and Georgie exclaimed, taking hold of a piece of ribbon which hung round her neck, and shewing two lockets which were suspended to it—

" You gave her this Claud; this, the blue one—she told me so."

" Ah!" exclaimed Claud, " how kind of her to keep it all this time—and my hair in it still! Well, I am glad she did not throw it away," Claud continued, with half real, half affected gratification.

But blushing, and with a pretty little half ashamed, half sly smile, she said,

" No; this is not your hair—it is aunt Gordon's."

" Oh, cruel Francesca! So you did then throw mine away!" Claud reproachfully exclaimed.

"Oh, no—I did not," she said, earnestly endeavouring to exculpate herself; "I gave it to Giulia, because—"

"Ah, very well!" Claud interrupted hastily; slightly colouring at the same moment, as he dropped the locket, of which, he had taken hold; and raising his head, his eyes fell upon Giulia, who had joined the group, and whose face he saw crimsoned with confusion.

Claud turned again to Francesca, but it was with an inward sigh, and with mere forced cheerfulness, that he continued to talk to her about Shirley and all its old reminiscences, on which subjects she, with pleased animation, gave and volunteered every information.

"Hector is grown very old," she said, "he can scarcely jump out of the window, now."

"And you, I hope, are not grown too old, and grave to do so?" enquired Claud.

"Oh, no," she answered, laughingly, "Arno and I still do so,¹ sometimes — though Mrs. Rivers is very much shocked—I believe she thought, I should be doing the same here, if I had brought Arno with me—for she made such a fuss about it, that I was obliged to leave him behind."

Thus they were artlessly chatting and laughing, until the room began to fill again,² and Mrs. Hamilton came playfully to drive away the little party thus occupying its centre, in order to clear the way for dancing. She smiled sweetly on the children—particularly on Francesca, whose hand she took as she looked from her to Claud.

"Ah! you have been renewing your acquaintance, I see. You did not know, Claud, that you had such a treat in store, as seeing this pretty little recluse amongst us."

The music struck up at that moment ; the little guests were summoned, most reluctantly on their parts, taken away by their parents, and Mrs.

Hamilton thought it necessary to satisfy the governess's grave remonstrance on the lateness of the hour, by ordering her own children to their beds.

But still holding Francesca's hand she said—

“ You must not go, darling—your aunt has given you up entirely to me, for this night — therefore, you shall sit up as long as you like, for once. Come, you shall dance with Archie—he will make you a good little partner,” and she looked round for her boy.

“ Oh, indeed ! Francesca shall have no other partner but me. I think I have the best right to that honor,” cried Claud.

Francesca smiled, and looked all eagerness to accept him for her partner, but Mrs. Hamilton turned and looked towards Giulia, who had retired to her seat, where she now sat with her face averted from them.

Mrs. Hamilton gave her son an expressive glance, and led away Francesca—Claud also

turned his gaze upon the Baroness. She was now looking towards him — their eyes met. He approached and asked her to dance. She declined, and he sat down by her side, in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
Though beauty long hath there been matchless deem'd ;
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dream'd,
Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seem'd ;

* * * *

Young Peri of the West!

BYRON.

NICE had approached Lady De Crespigny's side the moment before, and a few whispered words had passed between them; but she glided away as she saw Claud coming towards them.

In these few words, however, she had contrived to add the first drop of that gall, with which she subsequently, so plentifully supplied the already sufficiently bitter portion, which her friend's unhappy temper had concocted for herself—one destined to produce such poisonous effects on the happiness of her life.

“*La Signorina Francesca,*” she had said in a low tone, in which might be detected that slight mingling of “Sneers with smiles,” giving such strength to the sting with which one listens to words, naturally calculated to give pain — “*La Signorina Francesca,* is quite the beauty of the night — so it seems, *il Signor Claud* considers her. It is rather early for her to win all hearts from *us*.”

The wily girl saw the deep pallor spread still deeper over Giulia’s cheek, as she almost gasped in a low, earnest tone, and with an imploring look she could not repress—

"Is it not late for her to be here?—the other children are gone. Nice, tell her — tell her—"

Claud then approached as we have seen. Nice suffered some time to elapse before she complied with the unfinished, but well comprehended message—so the music had again struck up, and the dancing commenced, and Francesca was flying like a fleet fawn along the mazes of a country dance — her eyes

" Wild as the gazelle's
Now brightly bold, now beautifully shy,

glancing with glad animation — her sweet laugh, sounding now and then like a little clear silvery bell, amidst the louder music, as her partner, a fair handsome boy, a little younger than herself, strove to direct the wild movements of his partner through

the — to her, unknown intricacies of the figures.

The brilliant lights, the loud, joyous music —the gay, dazzling crowds amongst which she moved—what excitement was it to one, accustomed to dance alone to the accompaniment of her own sweet voice—Arno, her only companion, in the sombre apartments of Shirley Hall !

“ I am shocked to find that your aunt has never yet thought it necessary, to give that little beauty your sister any instruction in dancing,” said Mrs. Hamilton, as she flitted past her son and Giulia; “ however, I do not think any master could have improved that grace.”

“ No indeed,” said Claud, whose eyes had been following the little girl ever since she had commenced dancing, “ your sister is certainly the prettiest little, graceful creature, Giulia, I ever saw. She reminds me rather of the Spanish beauties; at least, in that pecu-

liar light, graceful form, which is one of their most striking characteristics. You scarcely ever see an ungraceful Spanish woman. Francesca's eyes are rather too soft for one of those

"Dark glancing daughters,"

as Byron calls them—still altogether she is very like some of those beautiful creatures I used to see in Spain. She will be a lovely woman."

He turned to Giulia, and saw her pale, dark, and gloomy, she looked the Giulia of other days, and her eyes were directed anxiously towards her sister.

Claud changed the subject to her own health; he remembered that she had been ill, and soon after, Giulia's arm on his, they were going in search of Mrs. Gordon, who, Claud had suddenly expressed a wish to see.

A feeling of relief had by that time stolen over the mind of the Baroness.

Nice, at length, had done her bidding. In a pause of the dance, she approached Francesca, arrested her progress just as she was about to dart off again, and said,

"Your sister thinks it time for you to retire, Signorina—she wishes you to do so immediately."

"What directly?" Francesca exclaimed in a tone of regret, her eyes wistfully following the dancers.

"Come, come!" her partner cried impetuously, as he held her hands, ready to start off, "don't stand talking that gibberish," for they spoke in Italian.

"Ah no!" she said with a sigh, disengaging herself sadly but firmly. "I suppose I must go."

The boy still remonstrated, but the implicit obedience Mrs. Gordon had inculcated on the young girl's mind, overcame her willingness to accede to Archie's persecutions, to disregard it, and she flew away, saying,

over, as those thrown open to
into which but a few privilege
ventured to enter ; indeed
seemed to have much desire so
sentiment of the generality might
judged by the movements of one
having chanced to look in, on the
group who occupied it, as quickly
saying, in a tone of great horror,

" Oh ! those are some *good* ones ! "

These prescribed persons consider
speaking, of two individuals,
their own hearts might be weary
pleasures surrounding them, en
censorious feelings towards others,
those pharaonic self-gratulations
~~which may indicate~~

being dull and disagreeable, is said to militate against virtue.

On the contrary they could smile,

"As through the loop holes of retreat,"

they peeped at the gay world, or heard,

"The stir—but did not feel the crowd,"

whose sounds of mirth and revelry

"At a safe distance

Fell a soft murmur on the th' uninjured ear."

These two personages were Mrs. Gordon, and Mr. Seymour, the young clergyman, who before has been mentioned. He was one of that class, who,

"Being honest in the sacred cause,"

to which he avowed himself the servant, both from principle and inclination, carefully eschewed the nearest approach to ought which might seem contrary to its profession.

To see these two beings, the widow with the mild benevolent expression on her still

lovely face, the young minister of the Lord,
with his calm intellectual brow,

“ Pale with thought, but not with care,”

to an imaginative mind, they might have appeared like creatures of another race to those surrounding them; Guardian Angels perhaps, hovering on the threshold of the world, to watch over some loved mortal, exposed to its temptations and its perils.

In the last part of this supposition they might not have been far wrong, for though it was certainly with human feelings, but as pure as such feelings could be, each of their hearts did anxiously follow a dear one amidst that glittering throng.

We may easily imagine that the aunt’s heart was with the spring flower, she had so tenderly reared—

“ Till now—the nursling of the vernal sky,
Bathed with soft dews and fed with air,”

now exposed for the first time, to the glare and sunshine of the sultry world.

But which of those gay creatures who fluttered past, did the heart of the young man follow? which of them did it yearn, to snatch from the dangerous vortex in which she existed--to snatch from worldly pursuits, to glide calmly with him down the clear, pure stream of the life, which it was his destiny to lead. There was one upon whom the observer might have fixed, as the object of his solicitude —one who appeared like himself, though living *in* the world, not *of* it.

It was Annie Hamilton, with her amiable countenance, speaking of something not formed for the sphere in which she mixed, her spirits serene yet cheerful—her cheerfulness, chastened however by the hand of some past sorrow to which she was resigned, though the wound was not yet healed.

Did she not seem formed for the calm, holy duties and affections which would fall to

the lot of the wife of such a man as young Seymour? But God sees not as man sees, and most particularly is this truth illustrated, in such a case as the one before us.

How often do we note the strangest contrasts--the most unlikely fancies in matrimonial connexions--the extremes of opposites coming together! and strange to say amalgamating wonderfully well--the gay, frivolous, worldly mind, succumbing to the charms of sober sense and intellect; the wise even loving the fool.

Mrs. Hamilton had often entered, to hunt out of this little oasis, one whom the ball-room could but ill-afford to lose, one who seemed, strange to say, greatly to enjoy the company of "the good people" who there congregated; and this was her own pretty, scornful Gertrude, who with the utmost evident reluctance, would on these summons allow herself to be handed off by some

Cavalier, who had been hovering impatiently round the door to carry her away.

Was the listless countenance--the undisguised want of zest in the pleasures of the evening, caused by disappointment attendant on the absence of Lord Beverley? He had sent an excuse on the plea of being suddenly called away to the country.

Many gave this reason for the cause of the fair Gertrude's listless manner. What would they have thought, had they beheld her, when she could again escape from amongst them and in the quiet retreat--of which she seemed so strangely to have become enamoured --once more all laughter and animation--then all gentle thoughtfulness; as if a new and sweeter spirit, than that which usually awakened the spoilt young beauty's breast, had suddenly entered it.

This was not like disappointment, or pique. Ah! Mrs. Hamilton, where have been your eyes for the last month?

Beware, lest whilst straining your gaze after the lofty designs to which you aspire, you overlook what is passing immediately around you. Hearts! may be escaping from your influence—hearts which you think are within your control, but which may prove not so subservient as you imagine—which may make for themselves wings, and fly away, far from your dominion.

It was in this same boudoir, of which we have been speaking, that Francesca, all glowing with excitement, had flown to her aunt, and told her tale—"Was she to go to bed?" her eyes asked imploringly.

"Certainly, dearest, if your sister advises it. She is more experienced than we are in the effects of dissipation, and does not wish doubtless, to see you tired and ill, the remainder of your stay in London—I shall not be sorry to accompany you."

They were leaving the room together, when Giulia and Claud entered, and a cordial greet-

ing took place between Mrs. Gordon, and the young man, who soon however turned his attention to her little niece.

He was sorry when he heard that she was going to bed.

"I wanted to have had a dance with you, Francesca," he said, "and it is provoking, I have to go to Windsor to-morrow, with my father—we could have gone off together to see all the sights; but I shall be back the next day, and then we will make the best of our time."

Claud held the young girl's hand, as he spoke, and she was looking up smiling in his face.

"What you will carry her off—cruel Mrs. Gordon?" he said as she made an advance to the door, "May I"—and he looked at the aunt, with a smile and slight shade of increased colour—"may I, for old acquaintance sake—my little sister you know—my little—" wife, he was going to say, but stopped short, and seeing no

look of denial in Mrs. Gordon's eyes, he stooped and affectionately kissed Francesca's lips.

She gave one of her merry ringing laughs, and darted off before her aunt.

Under what circumstances did those two beings meet again? Claud followed Francesca with his eyes, and then turned to seek for Giulia—she was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

What boots it to teach my heart a task
So vain as weeping beneath a mask?
Broken—with only ruins to hide,
Little it recks, of the show of pride.

L. E. L.

Yes—Giulia had by this time sought her own apartment, locked the door, and glancing at her pale face in the mirror, removed the glittering circle from her brow, which seemed to

mock with its radiance the gloomy countenance it adorned ; and then she sunk upon a seat.

It was not with the calm hopeless misery which had before oppressed her—more agonising than any suffering she had ever experienced, were her present feelings. Hope had once been inspired in her breast — hope which she could not relinquish. It had quickened her every energy—strengthened her to struggle against obstacles.

Remaining thus motionless for nearly an hour, her hands clasped tightly together, her eyes fixed in absorbing thought, she at length arose, took a taper from the table and walked to the door. At the same moment that she turned the handle, another hand did the same from the outside. It was Nice.

Both the girls gazed on each other's faces for a moment, and then Giulia passed on, saying in a hollow voice,

"I shall be back presently—I am going to my aunt."

"Ah another confidant!" murmured the Italian girl to herself, as the Baroness departed. "Poor fool!" and she entered the room.

She also walked as Giulia had done, to the mirror, and gazed upon her face, but as it would seem with a far different impression. She lifted Giulia's diamond *bandeau* from the table, and placed it on her brow—and her eyes flashed, and her lip curled proudly, as there she stood gazing upon the beautiful reflection before her.

The moments flew away unconsciously---so deeply were her ideas occupied by all the thoughts, purposes, plans, and suggestions which crowded thick and fast into her mind. She continued to muse, when a voice awakened her from her reverie, and a step in the passage. One more glance in the mirror, and with the diamonds still sparkling on her brows, she opened the door and stepped without.

But we will first follow Giulia to her aunt's apartment.

Mrs. Gordon was seated calmly reading when after a low knock, the door opened, and she beheld her niece, pale, and so haggard, her eyes so wild and eager!

"Dear Giulia," she exclaimed, "are you ill?" and she was about to rise, when Giulia sunk upon her knees before her, buried her face upon her lap, and faltered forth—

"Oh, aunt, I am come to implore your mercy, your pity—you will despise me, you will scorn me, but I cannot help it.. I was born for wretchedness—for humiliation—but oh! you are kind, you are pitiful—you can feel for weakness, and compassionate misery such as mine."

"Giulia!" exclaimed Mrs. Gordon terrified by this scene, "for mercy's sake tell me quickly---what do you mean?"

"Hear me then, my aunt, but do not kill me by your scorn."

She paused, her voice died away to a whisper, as with a look of terror, she glanced around at a little couch placed near Mrs. Gordon's bed, whence the sound of soft breathing was heard.

"She sleeps," the aunt whispered in a soothing tone; "fear not, she will not awake. She was too weary, poor child; tell me, dear Giulia, for you have alarmed me much, to what do you allude, and how can I serve you?"

"Take her, take her away," gasped Giulia, "take her back to Shirley."

"My dear Giulia, what can you mean, what your sister?" began Mrs. Gordon in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, my sister—she who I told you years ago, was destined to be the destroyer of my happiness, the poisoner of my peace."

"Giulia, Giulia!" interposed Mrs. Gordon in a tone of reproach.

"Oh yes," she continued passionately, "she

stole from me the love of my parents—she made me appear as a mere nothing in their eyes—she deprived me of the affection of all created beings, of that love for which I pined in my miserable childhood, the want of which drove me into that lonely solitude of heart, and fostered dispositions and feelings which render me hateful to myself—to all around me. And now, now," and she lowered her voice, "when a ray of hope has dawned upon my heart, which, if it departs, must leave me in the deepest darkness of misery for ever---she---she---has come across my path to snatch it from me."

Mrs. Gordon was truly shocked. She had not been admitted formally into her niece's secret, which would at once have interpreted this fearful outbreak, but if she had not before entertained suspicions on the subject, woman's quick witted perception in such matters now came to her assistance; she therefore did not press for any clearer explanation as

to what this ray of hope might be. But when Giulia paused, exhausted by her vehemence, she said, in a grave tone of reproach,

“ Poor Francesca ! how truly innocent she is of having given cause for offence ! Giulia this is indeed culpable weakness, as well as unnatural conduct. Dear child ! well may she weep over the beauty, which is to draw upon her the hatred of her sister, her only near relative on earth—the relation to whom she ought to have been able to look, for the love and tenderness almost of the mother she has lost, rather than receive from her, notice which almost savours of aversion.”

“ Aversion ! ah no, aunt !” cried Giulia, in a softened tone, as she approached the bed where Francesca lay, her long eyelashes resting on her cheeks, still flushed by excitement ; her lips parted with a smile of glad though calmer expression, than that with which she had sunk to rest, to renew in her dreams the enjoyment of the evening. “ Aversion ! ah no,” she

again cried, and as if softened by the sight of that sweet face, tears rolled down her cheeks. “God knows I would love her, that I blame her not for being so loved, so beautiful,” and she pressed her hands tightly on her heart as if to suppress its pains. “But oh! how can I not *fear*, yes fear that beauty, that attraction, aye perhaps even *hate* it, when it is the means of rendering me so miserable.”

“Well Giulia,” said Mrs. Gordon gravely, but gently, truly distressed at this specimen of the undiminished power of those most morbid, unhappy tendencies in her niece’s mind, which she had done her best to eradicate—and so vainly.

“Tell me,” she continued, “what you wish me to do—All that is consistent with propriety and justice, I am ready to perform, to relieve your present source of anxiety; though I fear, Giulia, that with such unhappy fancies, it can be but a very temporary relief—But I must have no concealments—I must understand you thoroughly.”

"Yes, aunt, you shall hear all—I have sunk already too low in your estimation, and indeed in that of my own, to shrink from any confession, however humiliating," and again falling on her knees before Mrs. Gordon, she confessed all the history of her love—the hopes that had been raised in her heart—her bitter agony caused by the idea that the attractive charms of her sister, with which Claud was so deeply struck, might dash from her grasp those hopes which had just begun to put forth buds of such sweet promise. His heart, she said, would be drawn again from her; therefore she implored her aunt to depart immediately with Francesca before the impression that had been made upon his mind, should be strengthened even by a second sight of her sister; she besought her to make some plausible excuse for thus suddenly leaving them, to prevent the chance of exciting surprise and opposition to so unlooked for a proceeding. Her happiness—or misery, she vehemently declared, was at

stake. She might fail even then to secure the heart for which she panted ; but still she might hope—she would at least be spared the agony of seeing him whom she loved so well, turn from her with neglect—nay with disgust --at the first tone of her sister's voice--the first sight of her beautiful face.

“ You wonder, perhaps, my aunt, at my presumptuous, mad hopes ; but the being who stands on the shore, may wonder at the folly of the drowning wretch who catches at a straw ---you know not the tenacity with which a miserable creature clings to a hope like mine.”

Mrs. Gordon was incomparably shocked. She saw plainly that reasoning with her niece at this moment, would be worse than fruitless ; though as she glanced in her mind's eye rapidly over the future, she trembled more at the thought of the fulfilment of the wishes thus impetuously desired, than from the idea of now in any way impeding them ; however she said—

"I think it will be impossible to go to-morrow, Giulia."

"No?" Giulia cried in a tone of alarm; but the next moment she added eagerly in a tone of relief—"Well but the next day! *He* will be at Windsor to-morrow. Oh, aunt, bless you—bless you for this! Only let 'me obtain this one—this glorious possession—his love, and I will return to you so changed—I will desire nought else that this world can bestow: and Francesca shall be loved—loved, as *you* even would have her loved. I feel that once secure of his affections—and my whole being would be altered. The shadow that has darkened my heart would be removed! a new light—a new existence would be given to it!"

"Dear Giulia," said Mrs. Gordon, with a feeling of astonishment—almost of alarm at this violent excitement of passion, "sincerely I wish you success in ought that would be likely to add to your future happiness; but remember, there is but one means which can

effect the change of which you speak. No circumstance of life--no summit of what appears to you, earthly bliss, will draw away that dark shade which obscures your happiness--*till your heart is changed*--till that spirit--the fruits of which are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, has dispersed its blessed influence over it. No earthly love can say "Peace be still!" to the storm raging within--it must be the love of Him, who calmeth the raging of the sea, and the madness of the people, which must first find entrance there. Giulia I will keep my promise--I will act as you desire, if you do not, when the time arrives, repent, or see the folly and weakness, which has prompted that which you require of me. But, my dear child, let me entreat you this night, ere you lay down your head on your pillow, to pray--as you have never done before--for that love of which I spoke; then indeed you will find a new light--a new existence irra-

diating your soul; then, though your dearest hopes may be found fruitless--even those with which you are now so fearfully excited--you will be able to bear their destruction, as coming from the hand of mercy."

Giulia, awed and softened by her aunt's earnest appeal, sobbed---wept---and promised all---even to bear with resignation the overthrow---if so it happened, of her dearest hopes. She approached her sister's bed---she kissed her cheek and the hot tears fell upon it.

Francesca awoke--started, and looked around her, at first with bewilderment; but soon recognizing her sister, she exclaimed cheerfully---

"Oh, is it you Giulia?" and flung her arms around her neck.

"I am sorry that I have awakened you, Francesca," Giulia faltered.

"Oh, no, never mind---I am so glad to be awakened by a kiss; particularly from *you*, Giulia," she added in a tone a little

tinged wth sadness, "I was however dreaming a delightful dream--I thought I was dancing to that sweet music with Claud."

Giulia disengaged herself from her arms, and murmuring a good night, departed.

It was long before Mrs. Gordon could seek her bed ; this scene with Giulia troubled and grieved her. She trembled for her niece ; she feared that her happiness--her peace of mind, had been destroyed, by the worldly and ambitious views of Mrs. Hamilton--by the manner in which she had raised Giulia's hopes. She grieved also for Claud. That manly, noble, generous heart !---was it to be thus bartered ---for what ? Mrs. Gordon's unworldly nature shrunk with disgust from the idea.

There was something in her mind, which revolted against the thought of a union between Claud and Giulia--they did not in her imagination seem formed for each other. Did she do right to leave her niece exposed to so much temptation ?

And then the aunt stole to her own Francesca's side, who was again sleeping peacefully —a tear, however, glittering on her jetty lashes, drawn from the little feeling heart, which had melted at the symptom of affection, alas! in general so sparingly evinced by her sister. And must she too be one day cast on a world like this---exposed to its dangers ---its pollution, a prey to the passions---the frailties it ever engenders, if not in her own heart, at least in those of others. How could she escape the ordeal, as pure as fair in heart, as now she was--and she so beautiful !

" I fear thy gentle loveliness,
Thy witching tone and air,
Thine eye's beseeching earnestness
May be to thee a snare.
The silver stars may purely shine,
The waters taintless flow—
But they who kneel at woman's shrine,
Breathe on it as they bow.
Ye may fling back the gift again
But the crushed flower will leave a stain.

What shall preserve thee beautiful child
Keep thee as thou art now?
Bring thee a spirit undefiled
At God's pure throne to bow?
The world is but a broken reed,
And life grows early dim
Who shall be near thee in thy need
To lead thee up—to Him?
He, who himself was undefiled
With Him we trust thee beautiful child."

CHAPTER X.

" Oh, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!

SHAKSPEARE.

Oh, turn from the false tongues that flatter,
* * * * *
Oh think of the thorns they would scatter
O'er thy path in the dark winter time.

H. BAYLEY.

CLAUD, on perceiving Giulia's disappearance, had sunk down on a seat by his friend Seymour, and conversed with him for some time; once while so doing, he happened to

look up, and met the gaze of a pair of fiery eyes glaring upon him—they were those of Nice. He had passed afterwards into the ball-room, to take leave of his mother—and still those eyes gleamed upon him through the crowd wherever he moved; like some fiery planets, ever present to the traveller's sight, as he passes further and further on his way

He had gone up stairs before leaving the house, to ask his father, who had retired from the company, some particulars, as to the hour they were to set off on their next day's expedition, and again in a passage through which he had to pass for that purpose, he was way-laid as it were, by a glittering apparition—Nice stood before him!

He glanced over her with some surprise, but with astonishing coolness and calmness, considering that she did indeed look most dazzlingly beautiful, as she stopped, as if at first

startled at beholding a different person to the one she had expected.

She lowered for a moment her shining orbs, murmuring in her softest tones,

“ Oh ! I thought it was Lady de Crespigny !”

“ Did you ?” he answered somewhat sarcastically, “ well, I am glad to have had the opportunity of seeing how well diamonds become *la bella Nice.*”

“ Ah !” she exclaimed, putting her hand to her forehead, as if she had forgotten that they had there been placed. “ Fool that I am to play the child, and deck the brow with jewels, which will soon be darkened by the convent’s veil, ” and she raised her eyes with a mild, sad expression to the young man’s face.

“ Oh no, Nice, I hope not !” he answered carelessly.

“ Who--who will save me from it ?” she exclaimed—her glance assuming its fiercer brightness.

monds on your beauty, would, I
sufficient to complete the conques
my eyes have not deceived me, I
already made upon his inflammable
then I think there would be no
her to

“Endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless

“The Marchese,” she exclaimed,
flashing fire, “never would I owe it
to him! If that were all,” she adding
her tone to one of deep, quiet
“the diamonds could produce no gre-

less wise than others, looks alone to the picture, not to the golden frame."

Claud fixed his eyes upon the girl, as if endeavouring to understand the meaning of her marked tone and words; he coloured slightly, and saying, carelessly,

" Well, Nice, I really am sorry I can propose no more agreeable alternative," with a still colder glance, passed on.

" The last struggle is over, and I am free ! Hate, revenge, be henceforth all that you need fear from me, Claud Hamilton. Scorn ! aye, twice to brook that look of scorn !" and Nice stamped her foot and clenched her hand. " It is enough," again she said, and she re-entered the bed chamber, and removed the diamonds from her brow. The fury that had for a moment defaced her countenance vanished, and she sat down calm and collected to await the Baroness. Claud did not leave the house without another encounter. At the end

of the same passage Giulia appeared before him, hurrying along—her dark hair falling about her flushed cheeks; but at the sight of him, she sprang backwards, with no unaffected dismay, shrinking as if she imagined he could read in her face, all that had passed in the scene, which had just taken place between herself and aunt.

Again her very weakness did her more service, than she could have imagined.

Claud knew that he stood before one who loved him with love unsought, unrequited; but still it is strange how a weak woman bowed low beneath the influence of such a feeling seems to rise in man's estimation; particularly when seen in contrast with one who appears, in the least to usurp their own prerogative, strength and boldness.

"It is only me, Giulia," Claud said kindly, "I have been up-stairs to speak to my father. Good night," he added, still more softly, as Giulia murmured, that she had been talking

to her aunt, " I shall not see you to-morrow, but shall be back early the next morning. Good night—you should have been in your bed by this time, particularly as you have been lately so ill ; it is not good for you to sit up so late."

Giulia returned to her friend, her heart bursting with the increased agitation of these few cherished words. She sat down, and covered her face with her hands, as if to hide the emotion expressed in it.

A soft voice murmured in her ear.

" Unkind Giulia ! she has been pouring forth into another's ear, the secrets of her heart, and she would now fain hide from Nice, even her face, lest there they might be read by her; she who once was trusted with every thought, every feeling."

Giulia looked up. It was not the Nice, arrogant and overbearing, as she of late had displayed herself to her friend, but the humble and devoted Nice, kneeling by her side, her

eyes raised with an air of gentle, loving re-proach.

"Ah, dear Nice," Giulia faltered, "do you not know all—too well?"

"I do, but not from you; not from your lips have I learnt the history of all the bliss that awaits you."

"Bliss, Nice!" cried Giulia.

"Yes, who that has eyes cannot see, that Giulia will be the wife of Claud Hamilton, oh! prospect of delight!"

To Giulia's charmed ear, these words fell, like notes of sweetest harmony. All restraint, all concealment was at an end. A full confession of her hopes and fears were poured forth to her friend, and Nice listened, and encouraged, and cheered, till morning dawned upon them, and Giulia then saw that Nice was pale, pale as death, and at length that she was weeping—yes, Nice, whom she had never seen weep before. And what meant those tears? were they the farewell to every spark

of loveliness, of good feeling, which might still have lingered in the soul, which had, vowed itself henceforth to the serpent's task.

Be it as it might, they were timely tears, and suited her purpose, as well as the resigned and grief struck tone which accompanied them.

"And I, Giulia," she cried, "oh, what is to be my wretched fate, a living death?"

And then those tears were wiped away, and protestations, vows, came from the excited Giulia's lips, that her friendship, her protection should shield her friend from the fate she dreaded; she solemnly promised the Italian girl a home with her for ever, a place in her heart —even the one next to him who might be her husband.

"You promise this," cried Nice! "then swear that no power shall separate us; neither the influence of love, or hatred. Swear that you will be true to me, that you will shut

your ears to ought that may militate against me---calumnies, insinuations! that you will believe *nothing* but that I am, through good report, and evil report, however circumstances, and enemies may appear against me—that you will, I repeat, only believe *one fact*, that I am your faithful, devoted friend! Will you swear this solemnly, Giulia?" continued the Italian girl, her eyes gleaming fiercely, her face livid with paleness; "and moreover give me this assurance, written with your own hand on paper. This alone can defer the arrangements which are preparing for my immediate departure for the convent. My uncle will be thus assured of the asylum provided for his orphan niece, and will think no longer that his duty requires him, to force her to a vocation which she loathes.

Nice brought writing implements—she placed a pen in Giulia's hand, and dictated the following words :--

“I solemnly swear, that Nice Cellini,
the devoted and much-loved friend of my youth,
shall never want a place in my home and heart,
as long as she wishes to retain it.

Signed,

GIULIA DE CRESPIGNY.”

August, 1819

It was sealed and placed in Nice's bosom.

CHAPTER XI.

“ His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles ;
His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate ;
His tears pure messengers, sent from his heart ;
His heart as far from fraud, as heaven from earth.

SHAKSPEARE.

As Mr. Hamilton and Claud pursued their way to Windsor the next day, the former suddenly thus addressed his son.

“ Well, Claud, have you made up your

mind about this appointment — for it is upon that subject, Lord — wishes to see you."

"It is too good a thing to be rejected in a hurry," was the somewhat hesitating answer.

"Your mother, however," Mr. Hamilton continued with a faint smile, "seems to have set her mind against it."

He waited as if for an answer, but Claud continued silent.

"I can assure you," the father pursued, "I had quite a scene with her this morning, when she heard where we were going, and rather surprised me by a communication."

Claud looked very grave.

"What did she tell you?" he demanded in a voice somewhat hoarse.

"That she had suggested to you, something much more to your advantage," his father replied.

"And what do you say to it, father?" Claud

demanded, fixing his eyes earnestly on Mr. Hamilton's face.

"That, Claud, must depend entirely on your own feelings. I will give you my cordial opinion on the subject; I think it would be a most desirable proceeding—a most important advantage to yourself and many belonging to you—but, at the same time, I would almost as soon see you wedded to a girl without a farthing, as contracting a mere mercenary, interested marriage — one, which could not lead to your future happiness. This is all that I can have to say on the subject, my dear fellow!"

Alas! what a contrast to the rhetoric of the wife — a contrast we fear, by which the gentler sex but too often suffer.

There was a pause of some moments. Were not the words of his father encouragement to Claud, to cast away for ever, any lingering scruples he might still entertain on the subject,

and reject, at once, all thoughts of the Baroness !

Some may call him weak—it ~~may~~ be so—but weakness such as his, is a frailty most beautiful—more valuable in our eyes, than the most Spartan firmness of character. It was the fruit of that virtue, which alas! seems almost extinct in the world in these later days amongst men—an unselfish heart!—a heart in which self reigns not---and his father's speech, frank, open, affectionately manifesting how little selfish considerations weighed in comparison with his son's happiness, touched his heart more than all the worldly tact of his mother's persuasions had done.

Claud looked upon his father's head, blanching more he knew from cares than age—he brought to mind, all the various perplexities that were pressing upon him--his struggles for his children, and should *he* think but of himself?

“ I was reminding your mother of one cir-

cumstance," suddenly resumed Mr. Hamilton, thus showing that he had still been dwelling on the subject; "something of which, she did not seem to be aware—namely, that Giulia de Crespigny cannot marry, even with the consent of her guardians, till she is of age."

"Indeed!" interrupted Claud, with eagerness; "that will, at once, settle the matter; I shall accept this appointment, certainly; whatever step," he murmured to himself, "I may persuade myself to take before setting out."

The appointment was that day conferred upon him and accepted. On returning to London the next morning, Claud found that Mrs. Gordon and Francesca had departed. That lady, on not receiving from Giulia any intimation to the contrary, had fulfilled the promise she had made to her niece, and--without thinking it necessary to distress her conscience by inventing any pretext for this sud-

den determination--merely saying, that unexpected circumstances rendered it necessary for her to do so, she departed with her young niece ; who, with implicit confidence in her aunt's wisdom and goodness, scarcely allowed a murmur to escape, at being thus carried off from so many delights, but could not forbear shedding a few natural tears, at parting from them all--and especially, without seeing Claud again, who was to have taken her to so many charming sights.

All were grieved to part from the little girl, who had won all hearts by her beauty and engaging disposition, and all were somewhat curious to discover the cause of Mrs. Gordon's whim--as Mrs. Hamilton called it--who supposed it was owing to a little touch of the good lady's methodism. Probably, she must have discerned some slight shade of London pollution already working in her niece ; who, certainly, by-the-bye, did her credit in every

way--for really, she saw no signs of the cloven foot in her pretty little pupil.

"Really," Mrs Hamilton added, "I shall have great pleasure in taking her out some of these days — for, I am sure she will not be long on hand," and then, some vision of the beautiful girl, and her large fortune, would enter her fertile *imagination* as connected with Henry, her second son — which *parti*, she had no doubt, would be far easier to manage, than the one now pressing on her mind.

In short, the thoughts of both mother and daughters seemed so occupied by other interests, that Giulia was spared hearing as many comments on her sister's departure, as she would otherwise have done. Even when Mr. Hamilton and Claud returned, though much surprised, the latter seemed too melancholy to express his feelings on the subject, with as much animation as Giulia had expected.

What a relief this was to her jealous heart; and the evident depression of Claud, she almost hailed as symptoms in her favour.

Mrs. Hamilton had learnt, in the meantime, that the appointment was accepted, and was forced to be resigned. She now lived in the hope of the proposal being made before her son's departure, as there was now, no possibility of the affair being completed before the Baroness had attained her majority. She even judged it advisable—knowing that she could go no further at present, with her future daughter-in-law--to take upon herself the office of informing Giulia of the business; insinuating at the same time, as if to give a favorable color to the proceeding, that the restriction placed upon the period at which she might marry, was the chief reason of Claud's thus banishing himself from her presence. Giulia colored, and answered in some confusion, but

even this intelligence filled her with energy and hope.

Of Claud's intentions on the subject, Mrs. Hamilton could gain no clue—for her husband had strictly forbid her again to mention the subject, or to endeavour in any way to bias his opinions with regard to the important decision.

But, at length, the day arrived, on which, before its conclusion, the fate of many within that house was to be brought to a conclusion—an eventful day, indeed it proved!

The exact time at which Claud would have to leave England, had not yet been quite ascertained; but the morning in question, he received the sudden intimation that it would be necessary for him to be ready to embark that day week.

He went immediately to acquaint his father with this intelligence, and found his mother also in the study. She wept with tears of unmixed sorrow, at the idea of so

soon parting with her beloved Claud ; but when that affectionate son was endeavouring to soothe her by his caresses and encouragement, the spirit of her worldly feelings returned, and she entreated him in the most pathetic and imploring tones, to make her happy ere he departed, in the manner he knew she so ardently desired.

“Anne!” interrupted her husband, in a voice almost of sternness, as Claud stood, pale and distressed before them; “On the contrary, Claud, under pain of my displeasure, I *desire* you will do nothing from the impulse of the moment. To press him to take such a step, which will decide his fate for life, is unnatural, selfish, and cruel. I should consider it folly and weakness in him, to give way to the wish, even of his mother, if his own feelings in the least degree rebel against it.”

Herc was a thunderbolt for Mrs. Hamilton. She was silent — she could no longer

hope, that without the aid of his father's wishes, the scruples of her son could any longer be combated.

This was a miserable day in Portman Square. However, one event before the evening somewhat revived the sanguine spirits of Mrs. Hamilton. It was not regarding this business of Claud's, but another from which she had also been suffering almost equal disappointment. Lord Beverley had never yet returned to London—and she had begun to suspect, that though he talked of returning, now that the season was over, he had no intention of so doing. Gertrude—poor Gertrude! And, not only did Mrs. Hamilton's worldly heart bleed at the idea of the disappointment inflicted on her young daughter, but the *mother's* heart was sore—for it was she who had raised her hopes. She had kept alive her expectations—and though pride evidently subdued every expression of her daughter's wounded feelings, she noticed

of late, that she had become low-spirited, and much changed—so gentle and subdued—so unlike herself. It grieved her to behold her thus; rather would the mother have seen the beautiful Gertrude as was her wont—less amiable, perhaps, but full of joy and glee.

And Annie too grieved for her sister, as much perhaps because it was a sad confirmation of the character of one, from whom once she had been loath to cast away the last remnant of regard, which had even survived the love which her strength of mind had taught her to repress.

She had long observed Lord Beverley's attentions to Gertrude dying away; she had seen, as she imagined, his manœuvres to extricate himself from the dilemma; he had even the effrontery to make *her*—his first love—a cat's paw, *faute de mieux*, for that purpose. He thought, no doubt, there was no fear of his being

accused of matrimonial views, when found so often by the side of the *plain* Miss Hamilton, honouring *her* with a few unmeaning attentions.

These attentions had made her heart thrill, at first, it was true, by the reminiscences they produced of other days, but they were now received with cold civility, more calculated to abash the confident, than even the most indignant scorn emanating from a piqued heart. Annie Hamilton soon shewed his lordship that she intended not to lend herself to be a tool for the furtherance of his plans.

On the afternoon of this day as Mrs. Hamilton and Annie were driving through Regent's street, a gentleman rode up to the carriage. It was Lord Beverley. Both ladies saluted him with coldness.

"I only returned," he said, in an agitated voice, "last night; I was going this morning

to your house, but was prevented. Where are you going to-night?" he eagerly added, "shall you be at the opera?"

"Perhaps!" said Mrs. Hamilton, trying to speak, and look with as much coldness and indifference as possible, "but Gertrude is not very well—we are none of us very bright, for Claud is soon to leave us for America."

"Oh, you must go, it will do you good," and Lord Beverley gave a timid glance at Annie, as if to sue for her assistance to bring about the accomplishment of his wishes—"The music will do Miss Gertrude good; and I must see you there," he added, lowering his voice, as he bent down and patted his horse, "do not you look cold upon me, Mrs. Hamilton, or indeed it will be all over with me," and Lord Beverley rode suddenly away.

Mrs. Hamilton looked at Annie, but she

knew she was not so mercifully or partially inclined towards Lord Beverley as herself, and was ashamed to confess how this little interview had raised her vexed spirits. She however went home, and ordered the most becoming toilette to be prepared for Gertrude.

But this was only a slight palliative to her perplexed feelings—what vexation and trouble had she brought upon herself! and not only were her long cherished hopes about to be dashed to the ground, but Giulia! she was doomed to the bitterest disappointment. In what a position was she placed in regard to the Baroness, after all that had passed between them.

“ All—all is vanity and vexation of spirit!”

Mrs. Hamilton was ready to cry for the moment, the favourite exclamation of the worldly, disap-

pointed of some darling fancy ; ejaculated oft-times, even at the same time the hand is outstretched to grasp some other desire, unmindful that it may perchance end with the same repining cry.

CHAPTER XII.

Thy weal and woe are both of them extremes,
Despair and hope make thee ridiculous.

SHAKSPERE'S POEMS.

Cling I must to somewhat—
Leave me one guide—one rest!

LANDOR.

AND Giulia, she had been out all the morning on an expedition to Hampton Court, planned by Mrs. Hamilton the night before; it was arranged under the pretext of showing it to

Mr. Seymour, who by the bye was still their guest. He was to escort the party, which consisted, besides Giulia, of Gertrude, to whom Mrs. Hamilton thought the expedition might be of use, and some of the children and their governess. But the part of the arrangement, most to the purpose, was, that Claud was to meet them on horseback, after concluding some business which would prevent him setting out at the same time.

It is unnecessary to say that the news he had heard of his unexpected summons put all idea of the expedition far from his thoughts.

Giulia therefore expected him in vain, and with no great enjoyment, had paraded over the palace, and gardens, accompanied chiefly by the little party; for Gertrude and Mr. Seymour were very dilatory in their movements, lingering so long over some picture, or beautiful spot in the gardens—little did she imagine all that awaited her on her return home!

She had gone at once into her room, for it was not very far from the dinner hour, ordered early on account of the opera. Just as she was about to ring for her maid, little Georgie ran into her room, as he generally did at that time, but he looked graver than was his wont.

"Mama is so sorry," he said at length with a sigh.

"What about, Georgie?" Giulia asked.

"Oh Claud is going away."

"When—not yet?" she eagerly enquired of the child.

"Oh yes—he is going very soon—not to-morrow, but in a very few days; he told me so himself just now."

Giulia sat down; she felt sick and faint, but recovered herself with an effort.

"Are you sorry?" said the child, fixing his eyes curiously upon her altered countenance.

"Yes, very sorry, Georgie," she murmured.

"Ah!" said the little fellow, as a flash of recollection seemed to cross his mind, "I remember Claud and Mama talked about you one day."

Giulia lifted up her head with an eager look.

"I wanted to go on riding, and I thought they never would have done."

"What did they say about me?" she faltered, ashamed of the feeling of curiosity which prompted the question.

"Oh, I don't know. Mama said you never eat anything, and that you never slept, and you were very good, but not very beautiful—she wanted Claud to do something, and Claud did not like it, and he said—oh, I won't tell you what!"

Perhaps Georgie if the words *had* escaped which were trembling on your little lips "*He said he did not love you,*" it had been better, though they might for ever have banished any further possibility of Giulia's fate

being linked with that of Claud Hamilton ; for although, as it were, she had heard enough to cause all the circumstances of the case to rise up before her tortured imagination with very nearly the same clearness as if the words had been spoken, yet there is something in the sound of a word once uttered, which can never be entirely expunged from the memory even by time. In words spoken there can be no mistake ; whilst indistinct communications such as Georgie had made her, might at some future time be forgotten, or looked upon perhaps as erroneously interpreted.

But as we have said, what she had already heard was sufficient ; she sat listening breathlessly till they were finished, and then sprang up, as if a bullet had struck her, and to the surprise and horror of Georgie, sunk down on her knees on the ground, and burying her face in her hands, groaned aloud. The child stood gazing on her for some time, and then pulling her dress, said, in a frightened voice,

"Giulia, Giulia—why do you do that? I must run away if you hide your face.'

This seemed to arouse her—she arose, rang her bell, and bade her maid order a carriage to be brought round as soon as possible. She had no energy to say more, but suffered herself mechanically to be attired in the evening dress which had been prepared for her.

Georgie stood watching her toilette, but in silence, for he saw something was wrong. The family had sat down to dinner, a message having been delivered that Lady de Crespigny was fatigued, and would not come down. This was a relief to more than one of the party. They were however somewhat surprised on hearing a carriage drive away from the door towards the end of the repast, and still more so when told that it contained Lady de Crespigny, who, the servants added, had ordered it to drive to Mivart's.

On the carriage stopping before the hotel, the equipage of the Marchesa was waiting at

the door, and Giulia, on entering the house, encountered that lady and Nice coming down stairs.

Both started at meeting so unexpected an apparition. Giulia was deadly pale, and at first could scarcely speak.

At length she contrived to say in a low, faint voice as she clung to the banisters--

"Do not let me detain you---I wish to speak to Fra Paolo."

The Marchesa seemed satisfied with this explanation, and proceeded to the carriage, for she was going to take coffee with a *compatriote*, before proceeding to the opera. Nice however lingered behind—curiosity struggling violently in her breast.

"Quick—quick, Giulia!" she cried following her up stairs, "for the love of Heaven what has happened?"

But the servant came after them to say the Marchesa was impatient—Giulia had

only gasped forth in a choked voice, as she pressed her hand convulsively---

"It is all over with me, Nice--your uncle ! go ! when you return you shall learn all," and with this, the Italian was forced to be satisfied for the present.

The servant who had preceded Giulia, had thrown open the door of the Marchesa's apartment.

"I wish to speak to the Padre Cellini," she said, and entering, she found it occupied by the Marchese. The man saying he would acquaint the priest with her Ladyship's arrival, left them alone. The young Italian looked as much scared when he beheld the entrance of so unexpected a visiter, as if he had seen a ghost. That afternoon a scene had passed between him and his *inamorata*, and he was pacing the apartment, still foaming with the irritation and passion, with which the recollection had influenced his mind. On Giulia's again murmuring confusedly the name of the priest,

he bowed and left the room, muttering that he would send him to her.

Fra Paolo soon entered, looking more grave and dignified even than was his wont.

His unstable convert had withdrawn herself lately totally from his priestly presence and guidance. She had yielded herself, as he had learnt from his niece, to heretical and carnal dominion. He fixed his terrible glittering eyes upon her with a mixture of severity and mistrust, as he said—

“ What does Lady de Crespigny wish from me ?”

“ She wishes,” was the answer, as Giulia advanced towards him, and sunk at his feet, “ she entreats to be hidden from the world—from shame, sorrow, and contempt. You have told me of abodes where there is peace—where there is safety from the storm of passion, of misery—where in deeds of penitence and devotion, the heart may be calmed—satisfied

even those who were born as it were, to be scorned—trampled upon by the people of the world—even a wretch who has loved with all the intensity of a human heart—yet who has loved in vain. Take me, oh, take me into the convent, instead of Nice. She has hope to bind her to the world. She is beautiful—she may still trust to be loved."

"Daughter!" said the priest solemnly, as he gazed on her writhing in agony at his feet, "I must understand you;—no sudden impulse of passion or worldly disappointment, is sufficient to ensure the constancy of such a determination. I must first understand the circumstances which have at this moment, led you to desire to take so important a step."

Giulia told all—all her love, her crushed hopes—how not only her love had been betrayed—but that he on whom her affections were placed, had been sued, and sued in vain, to take pity upon her—degrading thought! from which her woman's

heart recoiled with horror! The priest was eager, bigoted in the cause of religion. No scruples of conscience prevented him from taking advantage of the excitement and weakness of the moment, or of encouraging the desperate designs of the Baroness, to fly at once—to see Claud no more, thereby shewing, that she neither hoped nor expected ought from him—to escape that very night—and take refuge within a convent's walls! for such was now her ardent wish. But he possessed more worldly wisdom than the unhappy girl; he well knew that any such step would give rise to much commotion, and be fraught with new danger to himself, and to his cause.

Lady de Crespigny was not of age, and still under the dominion of guardians. Fra Paolo moreover had no desire to lessen the benefit which might be derived from her conversion, by allowing her to immure herself within the walls of a convent; more good might be pro-

pagated by her remaining in the world. He therefore contented himself at the moment, by commanding and encouraging her holy purposes, endeavouring by all the powers of his mind and tongue to confirm her in her religious tenets, the firm hold of which, could alone gain her admittance into that haven of rest, which she now ardently desired. The priest, to strengthen the influence of his words, appalled her excited fancy, by holding up before her affrighted mind, most awful threatenings of the wrath of offended Heaven, if again she suffered herself to be led away by the snares of the evil one; he bade her return home, and declare openly her recovered faith —her determination, which no earthly guardian could control! He added, that if she still remained firm in her resolution to take upon herself the holy vocation, should she not have been directed by the hand of God, to devote herself in a way more extensively useful to the service of the Holy Mother

Church, then would he joyfully see her cast off the trammels of the world, and devote herself to a life of religious seclusion.

The hours had passed unconsciously away — Giulia had given no orders concerning the carriage, but at about eleven, a servant announced that it was waiting for her. She arose to depart—her head and mind bewildered and confused; the priest dismissed her with a blessing.

“ Go, my daughter!” he said, “ and the saints and holy angels protect your soul and body. It is not without fears and misgivings that I see depart, one, who having proved herself unstable as water, may again be turned, by the first breath of the world; and then, alas! woe to thy poor soul, my daughter !”

“ Fear not, father,” Giulia murmured, as she wrapped her opera cloak around her, “ I have need indeed to cling to the Holy Church, which has the power of offering such a haven

of rest and silence—a refuge which is ever open to a miserable sinner like me, to whom the world must henceforth be a desert —a home where are to be found spiritual comforters like you, to whom I may pour forth a confession of my frailties, and my sorrows; a relief which the religion in which I have been educated, has not to offer.” She then left the room.

Ah, Giulia, who knows what not only a day, but an hour may bring forth? The case of the poor girl, was certainly one which suggests not inappropriately those quaint, but most applicable words of Pope—

“ When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be,
When the devil was well, the DEVIL a saint was he.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Though mountains meet not, lovers may
So others do, and so do they ;
The god of love sits on a tree
And laughs that pleasant sight to see.”

DAVISON.

ERE we follow the Baroness to her carriage, we must return to the events which were taking place in Portman Square. In the drawing-room were assembled, sipping their coffee, Mrs. Hamilton, her daughters, and Claud—

Mr. Seymour had also joined them from the dining-room.

It was far from a cheerful party. Claud was most grave and thoughtful, and Mrs. Hamilton's endeavours to be cheerful, and to keep up any conversation, were forced. She glanced uneasily at Gertrude, who sat looking very pretty in a most becoming dress, but with an ill-pleased, unhappy expression of countenance; the mother's mind was also reverting rather anxiously to a little scene, which had taken place between herself and daughter before dinner, on the subject of Lord Beverley; still she had not much fear that the perturbed tearful exclamation of—"I will not marry Lord Beverley if he asks me," was called forth by any other feeling than that of pique—of offended pride! It was impossible that she could possess a daughter as well as a son, so fully, (she styled it) blind to their own welfare.

And Annie, who generally endeavoured by

her own cheerfulness to make up for any lack of it in others, what was the feeling which made *her* look so pale and sad ?

Oh ! weakness of human nature ! how often does it rise up, when least expected—when we fancy we have fought successfully against it, and vanquished the frailty for ever.

The mother's sanguine hopes of Lord Beverley's intentions towards her sister, had made her also credulous upon the subject—but did she rejoice? How she hated herself—reproached herself for she trembled now the time drew near, when the lost treasure---the love she had for a brief, but never to be forgotten moment, possessed, was to be irrevocably another's.

Mr. Seymour too, he had retired to a distant table, apparently examining a book; his countenance was not visible, but his deep toned voice, as now and then he joined in the scanty talk, was peculiarly melancholy.

The children were flitting about the room, thus in some way enlivening the gloom. The

carriage was announced ; all arose except Gertrude, who still sat holding her coffee cup half full. She did not even lift up her eyes, now fixed vacantly on the ground.

“ Good night, Mr. Seymour—good night, children !” said Mrs. Hamilton kissing the young ones.

“ Gertrude, why are you going to sleep ?” cried Georgie, springing on his sister’s knees to kiss her ; and down went the coffee cup, and its contents upon the delicate dress.

All was consternation ; the maids were summoned—Georgie sent off to bed in disgrace, but Gertrude looking down on her stained and disfigured robe, said with a sigh of relief—

“ I cannot go now !”

“ Oh yes indeed, Gertrude,” said her mother, “ you must go and put on another dress.”

“ No there is not another ready, and—and I will not go to the Opera. unless properly dressed !” she exclaimed petulantly, and she burst into tears.

"Do not press her to go mother," said Claud, not liking this little scene to be enacted before his friend, who had advanced at the conclusion of Gertrude's speech. "I do not think Gertrude is very well to-night; you and Annie had better go, and if she feels inclined, I will escort her afterwards."

Mrs. Hamilton was too well bred, and also too indulgent to shew any demonstration of anger at the obstinacy of her daughter; therefore feeling inwardly very much annoyed and provoked, she bade Annie follow her, and telling Claud that he must come with them, as they could not go without a gentleman, entered the carriage.

Gertrude sprang after them and darted up stairs. The young clergyman was left alone. He threw himself into an arm-chair and sighed deeply—mused for a moment, and then began to read—but strange to say, he never turned over a page. The door at length abruptly opened, he started and looked up; it was only

the servants with the tea equipage. They arranged it on the table, placed a chair before it, then made their exit, leaving him again to his own reflections, with the accompaniment of the little silver hissing urn.

A few minutes passed ; then he started up, and made the tea, just as he was accustomed to do in his rooms at Oxford ; his eyes, however, not occupied with the tea-pot, but fixed on the *two* little china cups standing so sociably side by side. This certainly did not look like Oxford ! He then again sat down in his favourite place and tried to read. But no—his eyes were irresistibly fascinated by the same “bits of porcelain.” At length the door slowly opened, and with a sudden effort he riveted his glance earnestly on the book, apparently deeply interested in the study. Then he looked up as if aroused from his abstraction for the first time, by a footstep light as the falling snow.

Mr. Seymour arose, and stood grave and

calm, till Gertrude had advanced to the table, where she seated herself in silence. She was now attired in a simple but pretty morning dress, but her hair still flowing in its usual style, that of Charles the second's beauties. He then also took a chair by the table, and as she did not appear to see anything but the occupation in which she was employed, without rudeness he was able to fix his eyes somewhat earnestly on his companion, to discover perhaps, how far she had recovered from the dire misfortune which had befallen her—how far she was repenting, not having gone to the Opera, or in what proportion the disconsolate Lord Beverley was occupying her thoughts?

But whatever it might be inwardly, the outward effect was certainly most becoming as there she sat, the full red lips half parted with a pettish, bashful smile, probably caused by the remembrance of the little scene of which he had been the witness---the tears he had seen her shed so childishly and of

which he might still discern the traces. Yes! he did see that her cheeks were flushed to the hue of the brightest rose, and that the eyes when the snowy lids were raised, looked like Forget me Nots fresh from the morning dew.

The first break of silence was caused by her having made some mistake in the business of tea making. She had put the sugar into the cream jug instead of the tea cup, and on discovering her mistake she looked up, thinking that he had observed it. She laughed, blushed, then said as she handed him his cup, her little hand trembling as she did so—

“ How I hate crying ! it makes me so nervous for a long time after, and puts me in mind of the school-room.”

Had Mr. Seymour also been crying, for his hand was very nearly as tremulous, as he relieved her of the cup ?

He made some very inarticulate answer—

said something very common-place, but Gertrude's cheek grew still brighter, and suddenly she arose, left her untasted tea, and went to the piano. She began playing, but in a very desultory and uncertain manner — now a few bars of one tune, now of another. She tried to sing, but that seemed quite as unsatisfactory ; her voice was tremulous and tearful.

“ Oh, I bore you ! I dare say you wish to read, and I have interrupted you,” she exclaimed, rising.

She stood for a moment embarrassed, and then sprang towards the door, as if meditating an escape. Her companion arose. She turned round with a look of alarm ; he was approaching her, with agitation strongly marked upon his countenance — he led her to a seat.

“ For one moment stay,” he murmured, and seated himself by her side. And there she did stay, and for a very long moment—she stayed till a knock and ring broke the thread

of that very long and interesting conversation, and then she fled to her mother's dressing-room to impart to her perchance its substance. And though the arrival proved not Mrs. Hamilton, she remained there awaiting her return, lost in a train of mingled feeling—of joy—not unmixed with doubts—fears and misgivings.

Claud, after seeing his mother and sister settled in their box, had gone to procure them a book of the opera, when on his way back, he encountered Nice and the Marchesa entering the Theatre. They were alone, and the latter having arrested his progress, he could do no less than offer each an arm, and escort them to their box.

Nice accepted it, with an air of quiet humility.

"I generally have my son as my escort," said the Marchesa, as Claud led them as rapidly as possible along the gallery, "but he was not in the humour to-night."

"Poor Filippo," she continued in her half English accent, and accustomed garrulity, "he is getting tired of this London of yours, Mr. Hamilton—we left him at home sighing for his blue skied Italy."

"Indeed!" said Claud, in a tone of as much interest as he could command.

"Yes! by the bye, we left your friend, Lady de Crespigny, there also. I was very sorry to be so unpolite as to leave her, but we were just going to the carriage—and she begged us not to wait. I was sorry to see her looking so ill; she was going to have some conversation with—" but they had reached the box, and she cut short the communication.

With a look of sudden grave interest Claud had listened to what was said relating to Giulia—he glanced hastily at Nice, when the Marchesa spoke, the Italian girl also glanced at him, and on her countenance he detected a look of sullen mystery. Claud did not feel inclined to ask her for any further explanation,

so he bowed and left them, and returned to his mother's box.

His seat by Annie was now taken, and he could not ask a few questions he wished to put to her; his mother was also engaged in conversation with some gentleman, though he saw it was not with her usual animation that she was talking.

Claud soon quitted the Theatre, called a coach, and ordered it to drive to Portman Square. He asked of the servant who opened the door, if Lady de Crespigny had returned — she had not.

“What o'clock was her carriage ordered?”

“Her ladyship had given no orders.”

“Was Mr. Hamilton at home?”

“He was in his study,” the man said.

To the study Claud proceeded. His father was seated by a table covered with papers, his head resting on his hand.

“Ah, Claud,” he said, smiling faintly but kindly, as his son gazed gravely on his coun-

tenance. It looked so careworn and harassed as the light of a lamp shewed full upon it. But Claud knew he never liked having such indications observed, and proceeded at once to explain the reason which had brought him there.

"Father, do you not think this is a very strange proceeding of Giulia de Crespigny's, going off to Mivart's, and there remaining, when neither Nice or the Marchesa are at home?"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked his father hastily. "She cannot be there alone; is she not at the Opera?"

Claud then explained—for Mr. Hamilton had not been at home in time for dinner, all the events of the evening, and the Marchesa's communication.

"Is it not extraordinary?" persisted Claud.

"It is, indeed," said Mr. Hamilton; "I really wish your mother would put a stop

to the great intimacy between Giulia and that odious Italian crew. I have so much to think of just now. But, as to what you have just told me, I can hardly believe it. Why, it is not respectable! The young Italian in the house and all! she must be mad. Ring the bell, Claud. I will order the carriage to be sent for her immediately—but somebody ought to go with it. Really, it is a great nuisance. I suppose I must turn out myself, and I am terribly tired and bored to-night. My dear fellow," Mr. Hamilton added, "upon my word, I think I must send you to bring back this errant young lady, and I will have her in when she returns, and enquire into the reason of her strange conduct."

"My dear father, do you think that would quite answer? but, at any rate, I can go with the carriage, and see her safe into it. And, let me advise you," he added, as the carriage having been announced, he was preparing to depart; "to go to bed, my dear father, and keep your letters for to-morrow."

Mr. Hamilton nodded — grateful for this little proof of filial consideration, and soon following the advice, he gathered up his papers and went straight to bed — little guessing as he passed the drawing-room, what was passing within it; indeed, he imagined all the family were out; and, as for Mr. Seymour, he had forgotten, for the moment, though he was a great favourite, that such a person was in existence.

CHAPTER IV.

"Where am I? What soft strain
Passed like a breeze across my burning brain?"

MRS. HEMANS.

"Who can, in this short life, afford,
To let such mists a moment stay,
When thus one frank, stoning word,
Like sunshine, melts them all away."

MOORE.

In the meantime, Claud had rolled away to Mivart's, ordered the servant to send up to say the carriage was waiting, and was at the door

to hand Giulia in, when she made her appearance.

She passed hastily from the house, wrapped in her cloak, and seemed not to perceive whose was the arm that lent its assistance as she stepped into the carriage.

“Will you allow me a seat, Giulia, within?” Claud said, and without waiting for an answer, he entered.

He had seen by the light of the lamps, that she had turned as pale as death, at the sudden surprise of his appearance---so much so, that he thought she was going to faint and when, after seating himself by her side, he turned to look at her, she was leaning her head—her face averted — against the side of the carriage.

“You are not well, Giulia,” he said, in a grave voice.

“I am not well,” she answered in a low tone, but composed and calm.

“We were surprised,” Claud continued, “at

your remaining here, when Nice and the Marchesa were absent, and were at a loss to imagine what you could find so very attractive in Mivart's, to detain you there."

This was said quite seriously, but in a somewhat nervous tone.

Giulia did not change her position, and only muttered a few unintelligible words which he could not understand.

A silence of a few seconds ensued, and then Giulia lifted up her head and turned towards Claud. Had he been able distinctly to observe her countenance, he would have seen that it was deadly pale, but rigidly calm.

No sister who had vowed a farewell for ever to the world and its affections, could have, with less apparent emotion, looked upon her former lover. She even smiled ; but it had been well if she had left that smile alone, if it were intended to indicate her composure and unconcern. So Claud seemed to think, as a bright light from some lamps shone full upon her

countenance, for he immediately said in a very grave, earnest tone—

“ Tell me, Giulia, for it distresses me to see you thus—what is the matter? What is all this mystery---and what have you been doing all this time ?”

“ Doing—doing,” she murmured confusedly, feeling with agony, that all power of control over her feelings was giving way—even her heart, as it were, all—all melting like wax within her. “ Doing !” she continued, desperately, “ I have been providing myself with a home—a refuge !”

“ A home ?” Claud repeated with astonishment.

“ Yes,” she hurried on ; “ I am tired of the world. I have never loved it—and it has never loved me. Why should I remain in it? There are places, where I shall, at least, find that peace which I have long sought in vain. I have been conversing

with a very holy man—he has pointed out the way, and there I am going."

Claud began to fear she had really gone out of her senses. He took her hand.

"Compose yourself, dear Giulia," he said, in the kindest, but most distressed tone, "and tell me calmly—for, am I not one whom you have known from your childhood — one whom I hope you still — love. What is this all about? What can I do to assist you?"

Alas! it was all over with her!—the pressure of his hand on her's — the soft, low, tender strains! Her whole heart seemed to melt in a passionate burst of tears—her head had fallen on his shoulder. But for an instant only; in the next, she had sprung from him. She again leant, gasping, groaning with shame and agony, against the side of the carriage.

"*Whom I hope you love!*"

Ah, those words had been mockery!

"Giulia," said Claud, "may I ask the reason which prompted you to seek that refuge—that home of which you speak? Why is the world so distasteful to you? Are there none in it—not one being whom you would allow to strive to make it less so—whom you would admit as a partaker — a comforter in your sorrows—who would sympathize in your every feeling."

"Do not--do not mock me, *Claud Hamilton!*" was the answer in a voice of agonized emotion—"I require nothing, but that which I shall find within the convent's walls, I have sworn to enter--and from which, nothing—*nothing* now, can keep me!"

"Nothing, Giulia! say not that!" exclaimed Claud, again soothingly pressing the hand which convulsively grasped her mantle; "but listen to me—to one, who has ever felt for you, affection; and who swears, if, on a future day, you will consent to be his, to devote his life to promote your happiness, and

to endeavour to render the world less dark and joyless. Giulia, do you love me sufficiently to be mine?"

What were Giulia's feelings? Was she dreaming, or were these only mocking words? No, she felt her hand pressed tenderly--she distinguished through the swimming mist in which all else seemed enveloped, his earnest, serious, truthful gaze.

She turned away her head again — one deep sob relieved her heart—but she had determined.

" Giulia, answer me," said Claud, in much agitation; " will you not accept my sincere, though, perhaps you may deem it, presumptuous affection?"

" No, kind, generous, Claud, I will not," was the answer; and these words were uttered in a tone that was calm, gentle—but firm and resolute. They were no vain words. Giulia loved Claud Hamilton at this mo-

ment, more than she had ever yet done ; but she thought not of herself, nor of her own feelings.

"No, Claud generous--too generous Claud ! I will not accept it," she repeated.

"Generous !" exclaimed the young man ; "say not so, Giulia--on your part will be the generosity."

And these words were also spoken in sincerity--for Claud did indeed, feel, that the precious gem of genuine, unadulterated love--such as Giulia had to bestow upon him--demanded much gratitude, to atone for the comparatively cold feeling which he, alas ! could only give in return for it. And then, in a worldly point of view ! --- his thoughts flew to that rather galling idea--his poverty, her riches ! There would indeed be, a weight of obligation !

"Generosity on my part," she again faltered--"Alas ! alas !"

But then the thought flashed across her

mind, as to the meaning of these words ; could they refer to her fortune—her position ? and, to her heart, the idea brought a thrill of joy. To think that she had, indeed, the power of bestowing all upon him ! All those advantages, which before, she had ever considered but as mere dross—valueless, how—how did their aspect brighten—as in imagination they were cast at his feet gilding his future path, thus considered, they were treasures indeed !

And with all these worldly advantages, had she not also to bestow upon him—love ? such heartfelt love—exceeding in richness, all the treasures of Golconda ! When his voice again sounded in her ears repeating his suit, perhaps in terms of less ardour and passion, but with sincerity and truth of purpose, of which it were well, that many of the most fervent declarations could boast — in short, when she saw presented to her grasp, the magic draught which was to infuse new

offered? — The carriage stood at the door in Portman Square, a son handed out his affianced

* * *

Mrs. Hamilton could not tell what she had learnt from her husband. Lord Beverley had been so earnest in conversation, in which he had gaged her almost all the evening, that it could be nothing else than that he was in despair at the non-appearance of his confidante, a confession of his love for her.

A friend having begged for

and shut the door softly, lest she should awaken Gertrude, who she concluded was in her bed asleep.

She had sunk down on a seat—and then, was it grief, agony, was it some sudden and unexpected blow, to every hope of happiness, or some overwhelming prospect of felicity just opened before her, that made her sit for sometime immovable, as if turned to stone?

She must pardon us, if after recording so lately two scenes of the same nature, we pass over in somewhat a cursory manner the one which had been to her—a life—“a life of wonder and ecstasy!”

She had retired to the back of the box in pitying compliance to a glance—a tone of Lord Beverley's, in which seemed concentrated every emotion of hope and fear. She was prepared to hear the history of his love for her sister, and with a feeling of resigned misery, had endeavoured to nerve herself to her task of listener.

It was not for some time that she could believe that she heard, it was Annie, not Gertrude, Hamilton for whose forgiveness and pity Lord Beverley sued — for whose hand, with humility, and self abasement most sincerely expressed, he entreated.

It was a long confession. He had to tell her how his puerile vanity had caused him to recoil, at the first sight of her altered appearance, and to turn to Gertrude, whose beauty reminded him of what she had been, when first he saw her. He had, he confessed with shame, endeavoured to love her sister, but in vain, he *could* not! He was soon perfectly aware of this fact, but still he felt himself drawn by some irresistible fascination to the house. He had at length discovered what was the secret spell---one which shone on every feature of Annie Hamilton's countenance, beamed in every glance, moved in every gesture, spoke in every tone! He was captive to the power of goodness; sweetness

such as made him even feel his nature changed under its influence. He felt as if his heart were in the keeping of an angel, rather than a woman.

It was to a strain like this she had listened, until she indeed began to feel happiness far too ecstatic for a mortal to bear ; filling her heart even to suffocation. But how bad he been answered ? He had been told that he must wait in agonising suspense, for Annie must first discover whether Gertrude had been deceived as well as herself. She must know if her young heart had been wounded, ere she gave her answer. On this answer his fate depended.

If he trembled at the issue of this discovery, no less did her heart beat with agonising dread, to look upon her sister, as if to ascertain from her sleeping face what she so panted to learn, but Gertrude was not in her bed. Annie was surprised at this unexpected occurrence,

and opening the door, as if an impulse led her to seek her sister, she heard sounds of voices issuing from her mother's dressing-room. She listened for a moment, and then proceeded to the room and opened the door.

The scene she beheld, filled her with dismay. Mrs. Hamilton, still attired in her evening-dress, was pacing the room with troubled steps, her voice sounding in mingled tones of distress and displeasure ; whilst Gertrude, her eyes swollen with weeping, her head resting on her hand, sat leaning against a sofa in an attitude of the deepest despair.

“ Oh, Annie, is it you ?” said Mrs. Hamilton, as she turned round on hearing her enter. “ Come in ! you have just arrived in time for me to communicate the most delightful piece of intelligence ; certainly the most satisfactory conclusion to two years of trouble and expense, wasted upon a daughter, with which a mother was ever rewarded.”

Annie approached, and looked upon her

sister with compassionate enquiry; even forgetting for the moment in concern for her apparent distress all that so materially affected herself.

The poor girl sprung forward, threw herself into Annie's arms, and wept, for some moments, in silence.

"Annie," said Mrs. Hamilton in a softened but troubled voice, "you, I am sure, will not encourage the idea of such utter madness in Gertrude, as even to entertain the remotest idea of marrying Mr. Seymour. Yes, my dear Annie, behold in your sister, the young lady, who might have done so well for herself and family—who had it in her power to marry an earl and forty thousand a year—yes, behold in her, the would-be Mrs. Seymour, who is willing to bury herself for life in a dirty village, to devote herself for ever to the delightful task of dealing out soup to paupers, and teaching dirty children their catechism."

Poor Gertrude again burst into tears as her

mother thus tauntingly derided the scheme of happiness which she had so lately planned for her future life.

" My dear mother," exclaimed the mystified Annie, " what is the matter?"

" Only," answered Mrs. Hamilton with much asperity, " that Miss Gertrude Hamilton has just informed me, that during our absence she has very obligingly consented to take upon herself the situation of a poor parson's wife, and hopes for my full approbation of the step. I must say that Mr. Seymour has well requited our hospitality, but, so it is. Really it seems as if my children had conspired to thwart every hope I had formed for their welfare and happiness. Claud! what has he not thrown away? and—and now Gertrude, declares very obediently and dutifully, that even if she never again beholds Mr. Seymour, and if I can help it, she never shall again meet this reverend infatuation—she would rather die a thousand deaths than marry Lord Be-

verley, who has been encouraged for her sake alone, and of whose intentions and hopes ,you, Annie can relate, after your long, confidential conversation with him this evening."

Annie recalled to remembrance by the mention of Lord Beverley's name, with burning cheeks and faltering voice, exclaimed,

" Gertrude could never have married Lord Beverley, mama ! we have all been deceived."

" Deceived !" echoed Mrs. Hamilton hastily
" what do you mean, Annie ?"

" I mean, mama—because—he has—proposed to me—"

It is needless to detail all that followed this communication—the surprise was almost too great at first for belief, or for the realization of the idea—and the relief of poor Gertrude, whose offences were forgotten for the moment, in the new and overwhelming excitement.

The first access of joy had scarcely subsided, when the door was gently opened, and Claud entered. He gazed for a moment on

the scene before him—his mother seated, with Annie kneeling by her side, half weeping, half laughing, as questions and answers were bandied between them; Gertrude standing by with swollen eyes and bewildered countenance.

Claud was puzzled to tell whether it was from grief or joy, that his relations were suffering.

Mrs. Hamilton looking towards him, exclaimed,

“ Come in, Claud—you may well look mystified—but no! you had better have staid away—the sight of you almost takes away the pleasure with which I introduce your sister Annie to you, as the future Countess of Beverley.”

Annie was clasped in her brother’s arms.

“ Nay,” exclaimed her mother, “ you had better congratulate your other sister,” and Claud turned to look at Gertrude, who flew to him and wept upon his bosom.

"Yes! her brilliant ideas will be much more in your line. She will tell you that your *very good* friend Seymour has been filling her mind with nonsense, which I trust she will have forgotten by to-morrow." But Claud already had seen his friend, and been enlisted into his cause.

"Mother!" he said, "I think when you have enquired more into Seymour's prospects, you will not consider the step he has taken so very unpardonable, and that you will hesitate before you give a decided veto against making him and dear Gertrude happy. Shall you not be content with having an Earl and a Baroness added to your family?"

"A Baroness! yes, Claud," she interrupted quickly, "if *that* had been the case—even Mr. Seymour might have been pardoned."

"You promise that, mother!" Claud interrupted, "well, dear Gertrude, cheer up; for, mother, I have proposed, and have been accepted, by the Baroness de Crespigny!"

CHAPTER XV.

" In a brave old house dwells Magdalene,
* * * * *
I trained thee in this sober wise,
And in this solitude,
That thou might'st grow up innocent
Thoughtful, and wise, and good.
* * * * *
Oh, for a loving sister,
To worship at my side!"

MARY HOWITT.

A year and a half had elapsed since the preceding events happened. Shirley Hall had been the constant abode of Lady de Cres-

pigny, and it was not till early in the spring completing that period, that she had left it, for the metropolis, summoned there by her guardian on matters of business attendant on her majority. This event seemed, as in reality it proved, the breaking up of a long, monotonous calm; similar to that in which the occupants of the old mansion passed their existence, ere Giulia, launching into society, brought with that event the consequent interruptions and changes. The same party were assembled at Shirley Hall, and with the exception of occasional visits from the different members of the Hamilton family, nothing more momentous had changed the aspect of its affairs. One of the party had however returned at the commencement of the period we have mentioned, (as she really experienced at that moment,) with a new existence infused into her soul. She had felt, as it were, her visioned cup of happiness realized; happiness of which mortals may dream, but which seldom they are allowed to

taste. She had returned to exist on the remembrance of the image of its delights, and to revel in anticipations of a bright future. And those who saw, without knowing the secret of this new influence—for her engagement, with the exception of Mrs. Gordon, and the old servants, upon whom she could rely, she had requested, should not as yet be publicly declared—marvelled to note the new light beaming in the eye, the altered step, nay tone of voice, of the once grave, joyless young Baroness.

She seemed to wish to shew affection to her aunt, whom she found ready to rejoice with her in her joy; she was anxious to evince towards her, gratitude for all that she had done for her in her distress, and by Mrs. Gordon's advice Giulia had promised, during those two years of probation, to endeavour to strengthen and improve, by profitable study, the mind which had so long been wavering and tossed—unsettled by the unhealthy and weakening

tide of an ill-directed imagination---without such improvement her aunt plainly but affectionately warned her, that she feared the capability of her disposition, ever to find full and pure happiness in any lot of life whatever!

But alas! how can the mind for any length of time recover its healthy tone, how can noxious feeling die away from the heart, when round it has wreathed a serpent, silently and secretly stinging every evil passion into life, feeding and nourishing them with its poison. By Giulia's side might again be seen following her foot-steps continually, her bane---her destiny---the Italian girl Nice! not the arrogant---the fierce spirit which she had for a while enacted in London, but far more dangerous, the humble and unobtrusive friend—

" For he
Must serve who fain would sway and soothe
And sue
And watch all time."

This Nice knew full well; her heart had grown

very old and wise since last she parted from Shirley's gloomy walls, although even then, it possessed age and wisdom far beyond her years.

It may perhaps seem strange that Claud Hamilton should have departed without expressing a wish that his future wife would cease to retain about her person, one whom he so particularly disliked and mistrusted.

He had spoken to his mother upon the subject, without however hinting to her the principal cause of the prejudice he felt against the girl; he was far too generous to breathe a hint of the obvious designs which she had upon his heart. However, on witnessing the grief and dismay of his *fiancée*, gently and with resignation expressed, at the idea of having to deprive her poor friend of the only asylum she had on earth, he had not the firmness to be obdurate ; and so near to the moment of their parting, it was impossible to enforce the point ; indeed he felt unequal to any great

effort, for he suffered much from the state of nervous anxiety in which he had for some time been existing. There had been no opposition on Fra Paolo's part to Nice's return to Shirley Hall, for he and his niece had come to a perfect understanding upon all matters with each other, as had also the Italian girl, with the young Marchese; though it had required all the wily craftiness which she so abundantly possessed, to keep within bounds his ardent passion, and also to retain him as a tool, in case of any future necessity or extremity. Thus did this subtle girl contrive to arrange everything according to her desires.

And Francesca, the little heroine of the remaining portion of our story, now no longer the child in years, though scarcely less so in appearance and in guilelessness of heart. She had been reared for the last six years in solitude profound, but with judicious care and tenderness; with all that was healthful both for body and

mind, liberty and exercise ; all that was lovely and good had been instilled into her young heart ; and she desired as yet no new enjoyments added to those of her childhood, but such as were discovered by her expanding faculties. Still Mrs. Gordon, whilst she trusted in Him, whose beneficent hand had formed this lovely creature--to preserve her, if it so pleased His allwise will, in goodness and innocence, could not forbear a sigh of dread, as time rolled on, and she knew that soon the breath of the world must breathe on her sweet flower; and a fear trembled at her heart, lest perchance she had by her care rendered it too delicate in its purity to withstand the buffettings of that rude blast. How would she fare without her hand to direct and guide her over the waves of that troubled sea?

"But," she thought, "the Lord will provide who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

How little did the good aunt imagine in what

manner that faithful prayer was to be fulfilled, or all that would transpire, to prove and try the young heart she had helped to form.

Francesca at sixteen, we may now picture to ourselves seated in the dismal old library, where we first met her, sporting in all the fullness of her childish glee. It is the day on which her sister is expected home, and now and then she lifts up her beautiful face from the book she is studying, to listen, as some sound falls upon her ear, which might be mistaken for that of carriage wheels. Still there were none of those signs of eager expectation which might have been looked for, on a face redolent with warm and lively feeling, whilst awaiting the return of an only sister. Alas! even the warmest and most lively of hearts, must begin sooner or later to feel the chilling effects of coldness and constraint!—and poor Francesca had often of late asked her aunt with tears in her eyes, why it was that her sister did not seem to love her as she would

fain be loved by her—why it seemed such an effort to answer her expressions of affection—why it was as she observed, that Giulia's countenance appeared so gloomy when she looked upon her, and that she would even shrink from her embrace?

Francesca began to perceive and to feel all this. As a child she had often expressed something of the same sort of feeling—but then when her affection met with any repulse, she would soon allay the little pang it caused her, by turning to some other and lighter subject; and Giulia on seeing the little arms from which she had coldly extricated herself, the next instant with a merry laugh, cast round the dog Hector's neck, had often observed with a bitter smile—

“ See how little it matters to Francesca, on whom her caresses are lavished!”

Even now the young girl would often endeavour to turn off, by some little playful device of her brain, some mortification re-

ceived from the hand of Giulia—but now it was more difficult to forget it. It was so strange, she thought, to have an only sister and not to be able to feel towards her as a companion and friend. She knew Giulia was very wise—very clever, for Francesca was taught to look up to her sister with great respect and consideration. Perhaps she thought that it was her own deficiencies and inferiority which estranged Giulia's heart; but still she was her sister, and she might love her notwithstanding.

Mrs. Gordon would endeavour to comfort her, by saying that some people were less demonstrative in their affection than others; and Francesca—with that sweet spirit which “thinketh no evil—” would gladly comfort herself with this belief.

But still love cannot retain all its free confidence, when a chill is for ever being cast upon it; but she daily evinced more respect to her sister's wishes and opinions---for Giulia's

dignity and self-confidence had of late much increased--although her demonstrations of frank affection certainly were more than ever constrained. In the library then Francesca now sat on one of its massive chairs, Hector on one side occasionally lifting up his large head to lick the little hand which hung somewhat listlessly over his head, Arno still sprightly and gay playing with the tiny foot swinging gently about for his amusement; the only sport which for the present his mistress was in the mood to provide for him.

Mrs. Gordon was also reading in the same room. She had that day been giving her young niece a little lecture, from which she was now striving to shew her aunt she intended to benefit.

The aunt had said—

“ Dear Francesca, I fear you are not very fond of reading, indeed of study of any kind.”

“ Oh yes, dear aunt, I assure you you are

mistaken. I could study for ever with you; my lessons are as amusing to me as anything I do; why, dearest aunt do you think so? because I laugh and am merry all the time?"

"No, Francesca, I do not allude to that—but you are becoming too old for what you call lessons—at sixteen, young ladies are expected to have done with them; but, unless they have imbibed some taste for carrying on their studies by themselves, I fear their minds do not long retain any benefit from what they have before learnt.—Now you, dearest, should endeavour to cultivate that taste; you will discover its value some day, when your little head and mind grow older, and begin to require somewhat more substantial food than birds and flowers."

So Francesca, with great gravity and sedateness, had forthwith, begun a daily course of reading in the library, independent of her studies in the school-room up-stairs; and, if there happened to be any one in the room, to

whom she could occasionally chat, and thus break the awful gloom surrounding her, she did not much dislike the occupation. But she could not entirely follow Giulia's example. How much more clever she must be, to be able to sit without reluctance, for hours together without lifting her eyes from some musty old volume ! She thanked her stars, her aunt did not choose such books for her reading.

It would have formed a pretty group for a painter—that child-like looking student and her two canine companions by her side ; the dark curls hanging over the back of the oaken chair from the face, whose natural, animated loveliness, was prettily blended with the look of serious attention, which ever and anon contracted her fair brow —the subdued light shining through the high stained windows, throwing upon the whole, a kind of Rembrandt effect. Mrs. Gordon, as she sat and gazed upon it occasionally from her book, longed for

an artist's pencil to seize the aspect of the moment.

It was a very gusty afternoon, and the wind, which, indeed, seemed ever partial to that old mansion — generally finding some excuse for creeping about its walls, to steal in and whistle along its passages and corridors, had so often deceived Francesca and her companion, with the idea that it was the carriage, that they had determined to be dupes no more.

The library windows too were on another side of the house not looking upon the entrance—therefore, the expected carriage did, at length, draw up to the door without being heard by Mrs. Gordon and her niece. The servants were ready to receive their young lady, therefore no bell was rung. It was not till the library door opened and Giulia made her appearance, that her arrival was ascertained.

Francesca sprang up to meet her sister—

who, after receiving her embrace, and that of her aunt, turned to look towards the door, saying, somewhat formally,

"Francesca, dear — your guardian!" and Francesca, darting forward with an exclamation of joy, to meet, as she supposed, Mr. Hamilton, had nearly thrown herself into the arms of the stranger—who, at the same moment, made his appearance at the door, and bending his stately head, entered.

As quickly did Francesca spring backwards; blushing and astonished, she stood, for an instant, gazing upwards; something stronger, however, than bashfulness, riveting her clear, full, liquid eyes, upon that unknown visiter's face, while he bent his eagle eye keenly upon the little fairy form before him, ere he advanced any further.

"Colonel Vavasour, let me introduce you to my sister, and also to my aunt, Mrs. Gordon," repeated Giulia, and Colonel Vavasour then stepped forward, bowed courteously and res-

pectfully to the elder lady and presented his left hand to Francesca—the right arm was suspended in a sling—then said—

“ Miss De Crespigny, your sister has been so kind, as to allow me to accompany her, and make my acquaintance with the ward, over whom, I may yet, have the pleasure of claiming authority as guardian—though, I am so unfortunate as to arrive only in time to surrender up my rights to that office towards herself.”

Francesca smiled, but bent her eyes to the ground—a slight sensation of awe stealing over her mind—somewhat of the same kind of feeling as that excited in her heart in earlier days, by the threat that her fierce, warlike guardian, should be summoned to keep her in order.

But it was not assimilating the person before her, with any such fearful attributes which now called forth that awe; rather was it the softening of that deep, commanding

voice—the gracious dignity with which he bent his proud glance upon her, which made the young girl feel herself so *very little*—as much, as if she stood in the presence of some superior kind of being to those she had before seen. He was the first who had ever awakened such sentiments of veneration—for so they might be termed—in Francesca's heart—she, whose warm, open disposition, had been from infancy, until now, more open to love, than to that description of fear, which ever accompanies the kind of impression inspired by the presence of her new guardian.

It was strange for Francesca to feel thus—and when Colonel Vavasour, after a little more conversation, dropped the little trembling hand, and turned to speak to Mrs. Gordon, she took courage to survey more accurately the being who thus had affected her. And the survey seemed to have been most satisfactory, and to have reassured her that he was after all but a human being like herself,

though very very high above her, in every way ; and she was soon able, though perhaps with a little more timidity than was her wont, to smile and talk sweetly and gaily with her guardian.

Walter Scott's description of the renowned Scottish hero will afford the best portrait we can give of our English warrior.—

“ His stature manly, bold and tall
Built like a castle's battled wall
Yet moulded in such just degrees
His giant strength seems lightsome ease,
Close as the tendrils of the vine
His locks upon his forehead twine.

Weather and war their rougher trace
Have left on that majestic face
But his dignity of eye !—
There as a suppliant I would fly
Secure mid danger wrong and grief
Of sympathy, redress, relief.
That glance if guilty I would dread
More than the doom that spoke me dead.”

CHAPTER XVI.

" Soldier rest ! thy warfare o'er
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking
Dream of battle fields no more,
Days of danger, nights of waking."

SCOTT.

All up and down the galleries
Went the Lady Magdalene.
A—looking at the pictures old,
That on the walls were seen,"

COLONEL VAVASOUR, who we now for the first time introduce to our readers, after spending his youth in foreign wars, and winning for

himself an early name for unexampled bravery and valour, had at length been forced, having received a severe wound which incapacitated him for further service at present, to avail himself of leave to return home with despatches.

He had found it necessary on his arrival in London, to put himself for a month under surgical treatment; and it was at the conclusion of that period, that he met at Mrs. Hamilton's house, his former ward, Lady de Crespigny, and was able to take his part in the business attendant upon her coming of age.

Notwithstanding the lapse of years and the rude tumultuous scenes through which he had passed, he was far from having lost his interest in the remembrance of the romantic friendship of the late Lord de Crespigny, on his sojourn in that fair Italian Palazzo, surrounded by everything that was luxurious and beautiful; his eccentric but talented host, and his dark-eyed most beautiful wife—even the children were present to his memory, and the arch con-

apt the con-
as he lay upon
ing.

as often floated upon
a sunny dream, rather
now on meeting with Giulia,
~~C'~~ was more vividly revived, and
gratifying reflection of the impres-
he felt he must have made upon his
to have caused him thus to be chosen by
guardian to their children. His in-
terest in the past seemed to revive, on thus
again seeing the child of these interesting
persons, as if the events of late years had been
the occurrence of yesterday ; and on his ex-
pressing anxiety to become acquainted with
the daughter of his confiding friend, Mr.
Hamilton had himself proposed to Giulia that
she should invite Colonel Vavasour to return
with her to Shirley Hall, and he readily ac-
cepted the invitation.

It must have seemed a strange contrast, the

and quiet of that old mansion, to the
long accustomed to the noise of
battle-fields, and still more the
age of companions, from the rude and war-
like, to the fair and gentle ones amongst whom
he now found himself domesticated.

As strange also to the inhabitants of Shirley
was it to find such a guest within its walls.
He seemed, as it were, to revive the dignity of
the old place—to restore it to the time when
the owners of the old war apparel, now hang-
ing in the armoury, had walked through its
stately apartments, or feasted in its Hall.

And pride and pleasure glistened in every
eye, from the highest to the lowest, as their
gallant guest was seen parading, with his
firm, martial step, the spacious hall or galleries,
with the young Baroness, perhaps, walking on
one side, grave and sedate, and Francesca,
rather flitting than walking, like a very Tita-
nia on the other; and often the wish was
breathed, or even expressed, that the head of

the house of De Crespigny should wed with one so fitted to enoble and beautify its race. Those who were not in the secret of her prior engagement, would even please to interpret the grave, respectful attention bestowed upon his young hostess, as symptoms favourable to their wishes. However it might be, day after day the Colonel lingered, week after week; Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Rivers proved such skilful nurses that his wounded arm was progressing fast, and he found no necessity as he had at first apprehended of soon returning to London. Even Mrs. Rivers' countenance wore a less sombre, frigid aspect since the arrival of a guest of whom she so much approved.

Francesca's morning studies, with her aunt, were now somewhat interrupted, for her guardian seemed greatly to prefer the school-room in the gallery, to the solemn library where he was expected to pass his mornings. It was certainly the most cheerful apartment in the

house—because more lightly furnished—and birds, flowers, and such signs of youthful taste were there to enliven it; and then though he always begged that he might not disturb them and would sit down very quietly to listen to what was going on, was it possible that Francesca could proceed with her abstruse lesson, with her awful guardian watching her so keenly with his imposing hazel eye? Generally the tables were turned upon him, by his being called upon to relate some anecdote connected with the study she might be at that moment pursuing. And then her afternoon readings in the library! they were not so perfectly uninterrupted—for Colonel Vavasour was generally writing letters or reading pamphlets, and he would often turn his chair round with a quick sudden movement, and look at her, as if to ascertain what she was about, or startled her and caused her to look up blushing and frightened—and she always felt, as it were, nervous, expecting this manœuvre. Why did

he not do the same to Giulia or Nice? mused Francesca. Thus the time passed, till the rainy February and the windy March were fast drawing to a close, and then the Colonel began a sort of offer, rather than a proposal, to depart. He was ashamed to have so long trespassed on their hospitality! But the Baroness expressed her hope that he would not consider himself on such ceremonious terms with her and his ward, as to think it necessary to depart, ere he was quite tired of Shirley and its inmates. Mrs. Gordon would kindly express her opinion that the extreme quiet of the life he was now obliged to lead, was very essential to the perfect restoration of his health after the fatigues and accidents of war; and Francesca would exclaim against his departing just as the trees and flowers would be coming out, and when he could see that light and sunbeam could really find their way into the dear old house, which he had only beheld under the influence of rain, wind and gloom.

"But we had better not ask him to stay," she would exclaim as he shook his head with a hesitating, dubious smile, "I know it makes him very sad to walk along the galleries, and look at the pictures of warriors in their armour and lances. I know he is longing to be off," and as she flitted away with an arch, merry laugh, Colonel Vavasour's eyes would follow her with a certain, sad, grave expression —then he would pace up and down with impatient steps and thoughtful brow—but still he staid!

Nice had become singularly quiet and unobtrusive. In the meek girl who now seemed to shrink into obscurity, who would have recognised the fierce Nice in London, swaying imperiously her weak friend, and Italian lover, and as imperiously demanding, as it were, the surrender of the heart of one whom even her power could not subdue?

So well did she assume this semblance that Colonel Vavasour had not even remarked the

usually striking effect of those peculiar eyes, nor indeed noted her much at all, save in acts of common kindness and courtesy, for as there are spells which for a time can cause the serpent of the field to hide his sting, so there is a power vested in some superior natures, before which an evil heart will shrink, and in that presence veil their very feeling. How little did Colonel Vavasour imagine that in the form of the seemingly bashful, humble, inoffensive girl, a venomous reptile was crawling in his path, from the effects of whose sting he should one day so deeply suffer, or that she would prove the chief instrument, in bringing so speedily and suddenly to an active reality, that idea which had but crossed his heart and brain, as a beauteous meteoric phantom which sometimes allures the wisest imagination ; oh ! often would he impatiently condemn his judgment, for weakly pursuing this vision of bliss ! But so it was with the Italian girl—in

‘Silence but not submission in his lair,
Fixed passion holds his breath.’

And from thence it is able with clearness and calmness to plan and foresee all that is required, to prepare for that hour,

“ Which shall atone for years
• • * * * *
The power
To punish !”

Thus warred the passions of the unhappy Nice. Her views were extending—her ambition expanding beneath the glassy calm. The noble, the great, the pure, the innocent, the weak, must all be made her tools if so required. Her heart had truly become the seat of that evil one who “ goeth about seeking whom he may devour,” sad but not unparalleled example of the extent of deformity, to which unbridled passion can turn an unprincipled and naturally fiery breast.

Francesca had not been very well lately—her watchful aunt remarked a languor in her eye, a look of greater thought upon her brow,

less elasticity in her movements, symptoms which from a child generally indicate tokens of indisposition.

There was also a nervousness and inequality in her temper; one moment she would give way to wild merriment, the next, tears gushed forth at a word, a look, which in the slightest manner jarred upon her feelings.

Mrs. Gordon, although she was ever anxious to conceal every display of over anxiety, was easily alarmed by any such symptoms in her idolized charge. There was something so delicately fragile in Francesca's appearance, so peculiar in her disposition, that even though she appeared to possess much strength of constitution, Mrs. Gordon was always uneasy at any such fluctuations of health and spirits.

And on this occasion, (she knew not why,) she felt a sudden, it seemed to her, almost an ominous dread. She would not allow Francesca to study; she lavished on her sweet

favorite, more than usual affection, watchfulness and indulgence.

It was an early day in April, that the events, about to be related, occurred. Of the light and sunshine that Francesca had promised this season should bring, the commencement of the month was certainly not a specimen, for a more dreary April could not have occurred to encrease the usual gloom of the old, dismal hall.

The aspect of the weather seemed on this day to extend its influence over the spirits of its inmates. There were no livelier sounds heard during that long afternoon, mingling with the storm without, than the solemn tone of the organ, awakened by Lady de Crespigny, tones which seemed struck in accordance with the feelings of increasing gloom which might be observed in her countenance. And what had called them forth?

Alas! but the old story—these few words in a letter from her betrothed.

"Is sweet little Francesca as beautiful as ever?"

This sentence had stamped the day as wretched.

But her friend was ever by her side, and much sympathy and confidence were exchanged between them.

Francesca also was in a fitful mood. She was with her aunt almost all the day. Now and then she would start off as was her wont on such rainy days, flitting far and near about the house, but soon again she would once more be gliding back to seat herself languid and listlessly by Mrs. Gordon's side.

Colonel Vavasour also seemed to feel the day more tedious than he had ever yet done—he did not appear able to settle to any occupation—he also, would set out on excursions over the rambling old mansion, but, as if weary of such exercise, would soon return, and not finding much to say to his hostess and her friend—the only two of the party who gave

him much of their society that day—he frequently sunk into a reverie, with his eyes fixed on the grim warrior above the mantel-piece, dreaming it might be imagined of

“Battle, sieges,
Of moving accidents, by flood and field,
Of hair breadth scrapes in the immovable dead breach,
&c., &c., &c.

They all, however, met at dinner; and when that somewhat grave, and silent meal was over, Colonel Vavasour had sat a few minutes after his fair companions, then strolled up the old stone stair-case into the picture gallery.

He looked around somewhat eagerly, but saw nought but the tall, stiff figure of Mrs. Rivers, who, with a ponderous bunch of keys in her hand, stood as if she had been engaged in conversation with some one near her.

“Good evening, Mrs. Rivers,” Colonel Va-

"I am very glad, for I think she is very pretty and merry-looking. I would rather—much rather be like her in every respect, than resemble those demure-looking ladies around her."

"Miss Francesca, you know not what you say," interposed Mrs. Rivers, with severity; "there is such a thing as fair and foul; wantonness and smiles, where there should be tears and penitence — tinsel and finery, where there ought to be sack-cloth and ashes."

Colonel Vavasour looked at the dismayed countenance of the innocent Francesca with a smile, and glanced at the picture with still greater interest. Nice at this moment entered the gallery, but after saying a few words in a low tone to Francesca, who approached to meet her, she disappeared.

"You are not going, Miss de Crespiigny?" said Colonel Vavasour, quickly,

as he perceived his ward somewhat slowly preparing to follow her.

“Yes,” she answered, turning round her head for a moment, “Giulia wants me,” and she walked away.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The warrior's heart when touched by me,
Can as downy, soft, and as yielding be,
As his own white plume, that high amid death,
Through the field has shone—yet moves with a breath."

LALLA ROOKES.

FRANCESCA went immediately to the library, for there Nice had, with somewhat of harsh authority in her tone, ordered her to attend her sister.

This peculiar tone, the Italian seemed to

have a delight in using towards Francesca, whenever an opportunity occurred, which she could decently seize for the display of her power; it appeared as if she longed to throw her toils over one, who, hitherto, had ever been shielded from her arts, as if by some invisible spell.

The two friends were seated side by side when she entered, and Giulia turning towards her, said with a somewhat grave and solemn expression—

“ Francesca, do you not think it would be better for you to come here and sit with us, instead of wandering about the house all the evening with Colonel Vavasour ?”

“ I was only in the gallery with Colonel Vavasour, Giulia,” Francesca replied, in a tone of some surprise.

“ Yes ; I am aware of that,” her sister answered, still more solemnly ; “ but I dare say, Colonel Vavasour does not require your attendance ; and, as you are no longer a child, we

think it were as well, that you should acquire more regular habits, and be more like other people. Young ladies of sixteen generally prefer reading or working, to following the guests about like a child."

Poor Francesca sat down in silence, for a feeling she had never before experienced arose in her heart, choked her voice, and prevented her from uttering the words which rose to her lips, when the sentence, "as we have been thinking," accompanied by a glance from her sister towards Nice, sounded offensively on her ear; words, which to judge by the momentary flash which turned the violet softness of Francesca's eyes into the "Sapphire's blaze," were such as the old fanciful poet might well have sworn to be of a nature, to oblige the teeth of that little mouth to break,

" That they might passage get."

but they died away in silence and the big tears

gathered, and quenched the momentary gleam of anger.

Alas! the poor little girl! there was no need to remind her of her departing childhood; she had already felt what she supposed must be the forerunner of grown up years---a depression---indefinable wishes beyond the childish fancies which had so long satisfied her; altogether she began to think it must be a very miserable thing to be a woman. And now to be so sternly reminded of her misfortune, and worse than all to experience shame and mortified pride, called forth by the implied reproof of "following Colonel Vavasour!"

Following him! had she not been reproaching herself only that very day, for the silly feeling which made her run away when she heard his step or voice.

She sat for some time twisting some silk she had hastily taken up, till she had sufficiently recovered her composure to feel that

the ominous gloom of the party which she had been so peremptorily summoned to join, was not at all agreeable. To break the stillness she endeavoured to talk to Giulia, who however gave her no great encouragement to persevere, and then she had recourse to Arno.

The library was becoming so obscure and sombre, and Nice so disagreeably inclined to fix her eyes upon her! This evening was the first time she had ever minded who looked at her, and she particularly felt the effect of the peculiar gaze of “the glittering eye;” so at length saying, it was too dark for work, and that she must go and see her aunt Gordon, who was suffering from a head-ache, and had retired to her own apartment, the young girl left the room.

In the mean time Colonel Vavasour had been left *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Rivers. Her original eccentricity greatly interested him, and this evening, finding the old lady in a more communicative mood than usual, he encouraged her to talk on various subjects relating to the

old house, and the state of preservation in which under her superintendence it had retained its ancient relics.

The armour was at length their theme, and becoming eloquent on a subject in which Colonel Vavasour entered *con amore*, it ended by their going to inspect an entire suit, the last, worn by a Baron of the house, and which having only that day been newly cleaned and furbished in the old armoury, had, just before his entrance, been replaced in the gallery, where it was allowed to stand alone, like the guardian of the mansion.

A venerable man, his back bowed with years, came tottering in, as they were thus engaged, in order to restore some part of the armour which had become unfastened. It had long been his office to clean the various accoutrements, though now growing too old to do aught but assist in performing a few easy tasks.

The old man was one of the few remaining

ancient retainers of the family. His grey eyes lighted up, after performing the business for which he had come, and he turned them upon the noble form of the hero by his side—then encouraged by a few kind words from Colonel Vavasour, rubbing his hands with a low, pleased chuckle, he said, looking first at Mrs. Rivers, and then from the Colonel to the armour—

“ Yes, he’s just right—just a fit, as Miss Francesca was saying.”

“ What are you talking about, old Davie?” exclaimed Mrs. Rivers somewhat sternly, seeing Colonel Vavasour look astonished at this outbreak. “ He is thinking of some years ago, sir,” she continued in an apologetic voice, “ when I hindered Mr. Claud Hamilton from dressing up in this suit, as he was about to do, for the amusement of Miss Francesca; and my preventing the scheme was a great disappointment to the young lady who was not much used to be crossed in her little whims—

but it was not on striplings such as he--though he was in truth a fine lad--that I wished to see that armour."

Colonel Vavasour began to examine more minutely the fastenings and joinings of the suit—the old man eagerly following his movements with his keen eyes.

"Do you think," he said, in a somewhat hesitating tone, "that Miss de Crespiigny would really now care about seeing the effect of the armour when worn by any one; for I shall be happy some day to—"

"Would she? Wouldn't she?" chuckled old Davie, rubbing his hands joyfully, "why she came in to-day and caught me rubbing it up, and 'Davie,' she says to me, 'I would give worlds to see that tall, handsome soldier we have here,' (I beg your pardon, sir, but I tell you her own words,) 'dressed up in that suit—Mrs. Rivers would not call him a stripling, I suppose?' and then she quite sighed about it. Oh! she's one that should never

world—done in a minut

In short the old man
Colonel Vavasour's servant
soldier, was summoned,
assisted to equip his master
now faint light of the complete
armour with lance
looking a warrior as ever
England's olden days.

Old Davie, after feastir
for a few minutes, followed
ling and rubbing his hand
treat he had gained for
Francie; and Mrs. River
summon the ladies.

She met Francesca at

With all the eager curiosity of a child, the young lady flew up stairs, and Colonel Vavasour, as he stood on the same spot which the empty armour had before occupied, with a conscious smile at the thought of his novel position of thus masquerading for the amusement of a girl, saw Francesca bound into the gallery, and gaze eagerly round with her brilliant, animated eye.

He advanced a few steps, her eyes turned upon him with a wild stare of astonishment, and then with a faint cry, she sprang forward and was kneeling at his feet—her hands clasped, her head thrown back, and her face raised towards his, with an expression it was difficult accurately to define. It was scarcely like fear—scarcely admiration which lighted up her pale countenance; for the moment she remained immovable in this attitude ; she was like one “breathless with adoration.”

Colonel Vavasour bent down a look upon

her, (for his visor was raised,) in which there was no such ambiguity—it was unmixed admiration. Admiration! oh! far too cold a phrase to describe that glance. He fancied however that what he saw, was but the most perfect piece of pretty playful acting imaginable, and with the intention of carrying on the pageant he had in sport commenced, he raised high his gauntleted hands and held the lance in a threatening gesture above her head. But then the little hands gradually unclasped, and Francesca sunk gently forwards and lay prostrate at his feet.

This could scarcely be acting.

“ Francesca!” Colonel Vavasour exclaimed in a lower, softer tone than ever conqueror called on a prostrate foe.

This was all he said, but it expressed much. Never before had he called her by that name!

She had often wondered at the gentle, but almost ceremonious respect observed in his

deportment towards herself by one so superior—she who, by every one else, was treated but as a child. At this moment, however, she noticed not the change.

Colonel Vavasour cast aside the lance and cumbrous gauntlets, and lifted Francesca from the ground, but her eyes were closed---her face was white as the purest marble. He held her in his arms like a child --- her dark hair floated over his mailed shoulder, as her drooping head rested upon his breast --- her slender arms hung listless by his side.

A bold, strong heart beat within that steel breast-plate, but all the tenderness of a woman seemed, at that moment, to gush into his heart; that eagle eye was moistened by a tear, and with an irresolute impulse, he strained his young ward to his heart, and pressed his lips on her fair, innocent brow.

When he again raised his head, they were

not alone. The Baroness and Nice were standing at a few paces distant — their eyes fixed upon him. Perhaps Colonel Vavasour had never before felt as he now did, in the presence of these two girls. He was abashed — although he knew that there was no legitimate cause for the painful sensation of embarrassment under which he was suffering. The colour flew to his face as he advanced to meet them, and with some confusion, related the circumstances of his fair burden's present situation.

A peculiar expression passed over Giulia's countenance on hearing this explanation, taking place of the look of intense astonishment with which she had observed the scene they had just interrupted. She gave a quiet, answering look to the glance of significance Nice fixed upon her; and then, for the first time, seeming to remember her sister's strange indisposition, Giulia took her cold hand, and gazing upon her face with real solicitude, desired Nice to

call for assistance. Nice had already done so, and Mrs. Rivers made her appearance.

"We had better at once, carry her to her room," said Colonel Vavasour, in a decided tone--for he already saw a faint tint of colour returning to the cheek and lips of the young girl.

Mrs. Rivers threw open the door of the east corridor, and Francesca was borne along, tenderly and carefully, by Colonel Vavasour, the others following.

Mrs. Gordon was just leaving her room, when this little procession met her astonished gaze. She too, had been informed of Colonel Vavasour's intention of gratifying her young niece's wish of beholding the armour worn, and was on the point of proceeding to witness Francesca's delight at the sight. She was too much alarmed to ask for any explanation of the present scene, until she had seen the dear

girl placed upon her bed by Colonel Vavasour, who, after opening the window, left the room.

With a slight, convulsive sigh, her eyes unclosed, and her senses returned. Then, with eager solicitude, the aunt demanded an explanation of the unlooked for event. Colonel Vavasour had requested that he might have an interview with her in the school-room, where he anxiously awaited intelligence of his ward, and Mrs. Gordon learnt from him, that Francesca had, as he imagined, been startled by his unexpected appearance in such a guise, and he was truly distressed, as well as angry with himself, for having been the cause of giving her so great a shock.

Mrs. Gordon assured him, that at any other time this would probably not have occurred; but that of late, her young niece had appeared to suffer from unusual suscep-

tibility of nerves ; she attributed this, to the want of air and exercise, which the late rainy season had rendered obligatory, and hoped that change of scene, which she shortly intended to give her, would set all to rights.

Mrs. Gordon then returned to the dear invalid, who, having been undressed and put to bed, lay calm and tranquil, as if just awakened from a quiet sleep, apparently unconscious of what had occurred. The feeling of solicitude, however, which had for sometime troubled the aunt's anxious heart, was not lessened by this last incident ; and trivial as it might appear to others, to her it imparted a sensation of dread, which she could not shake off. It seemed as if ominous of some approaching interruption to her hitherto untroubled, placid stream of existence. But Mrs. Gordon strove to banish thoughts which might have been almost deemed superstitious, and prayed that these signs of com-

ing change in her darling charge might prove—

“ Like shadows of those clouds, that o'er the sea
Pass, and leave clear the mirror.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Thou sweetest thing
That e'er did fix its lightly fibred sprays
To the rude rock—ah! wouldst thou cling to me?
+ + But if thou lov'st me,
* * I will love thee again,
With true and honest heart, tho' all unmeet
To be the mate of such sweet gentleness."

JOANNA BAILLIE.

If our readers will now proceed with us to another apartment in that corridor—Lady De Crespigny's room — they will behold a scene less tranquil than that which we have just quitted.

True it was that Nice was there seated calm and unmoved, her eyes bright and glittering, observing in silence the movements of her friend. But on Giulia's countenance there was evidence of strong agitation and excitement, as she paced the room with hurried steps. Very different truly was her outward demeanour, to that of the composed and dignified Baroness, for such was the deportment she had of late assumed.

"Nice!" at length she cried, stopping before her friend, "if this could be possible—if I could dare consider it anything but as a suggestion of the kind sympathy and consideration you ever feel for your friend's happiness, an anxiety which may even in this instance, blind your strong and excellent judgment, I should indeed look upon you as my saving angel—the chaser of all those dark clouds which again seem gathering to overshadow the happiness, I did for a brief space consider so secure. But is it possible, is it credible; so

widely different in age—in spirit—in feeling ? He so excellent—so proud—so great ; she, such a child in appearance—in mind—Oh, Nice ! can you think ?—”

“ I have already told you what I think,” interrupted Nice with cold composure, “ I have only given you the result of my calm observation of many a day, and my surmises have been confirmed by the scene which we surprised in the gallery this evening ; at least with respect to one of the party. As regards the other,” she continued in a careless manner, “ I consider that there is no such impossibility or incongruity in the case. I will not, however, endeavour any longer to persuade you to believe what I say, if it so greatly please you to raise scruples in your mind against its truth. I only add, that I think it would be almost remiss in you, the natural guardian over your sister’s welfare, to allow such an opportunity to escape, of forwarding an affair, which may importantly influence, not only your

own happiness, but also that of *Francesca*."

Giulia listened to Nice's words with breathless eagerness.

"Yes," the zealous friend continued, "it was the fashion, to ridicule the severity with which old Mrs. Rivers used to regard, what was considered the bewitching playfulness and gaiety of the spoilt little beauty, when a child; and her grave forebodings of the danger of encouraging what she termed levity. It did indeed seem then out of place, for, as a child, her infantine ways were indeed very pretty, very attractive; but at sixteen, it is time, as we were only remarking this afternoon, to lay aside so light a bearing. Such innocent thoughtlessness can only now be considered, as a very pretty covering, to tendencies, which may not only bring trouble on herself but on others."

"Nice!" exclaimed Giulia, unfeignedly shocked.

"Yes," the Italian girl continued, "it is

a pity, I think, that good Mrs. Gordon still continues to encourage Francesca's childish freedom of manner; for as she is now no longer a baby, I fear any impertinent observers might look upon it, as an incipient inclination to coquetry, an absence of feminine regard to strict ideas of propriety. Even so long ago as at that ball in Portman Square, we had an opportunity of judging, what must be the probable effect of the natural laxity of manner, which, though at that time she was fourteen, her very childish appearance enabled her to assume."

Giulia covered her face with her hands and groaned.

"What then," Nice continued, "would be kinder towards her, than---effectually I trust---to nip in the bud such tendencies of character, by providing her with a husband, forming for your sister, an alliance with one whom it would be so honorable to wed---in every way desirable; particularly to a girl so young and inconsiderate as

Francesca ; a man suited in every way to guide her through life---and who after what we accidentally witnessed to day, ought to be willing to make her his wife at the very first suggestion. She is young assuredly--but believe me, she will be nothing loath ;" here Nice smiled with the sarcastic expression of a demon. " And even were she to make any objection," the girl continued, " do you not stand, I again repeat, in the place of her parents ; her aunt has at least taught her some feeling of respect and reverence towards you ; and my final advice Giulia, is, that as you value her prosperity ; and," she added in a low, mysterious tone of voice, " your peace of mind hereafter, act up to this authority--if so required."

" My mother with her dying breath, besought me never to lose sight of my sister's welfare," murmured Giulia, as if thus endeavouring to reconcile as far as possible her conscience, with these ably applied suggestions of her bosom friend—" perhaps—perhaps it is

my duty—but how am I to act—how proceed?"

When characters such as Giulia's, prone to let "*I dare not*, wait upon *I would*," are influenced, to a pitch of excitement, either by their passions, or the guidance of more resolute minds, as if conscious of their natural weakness, they eagerly seize upon this excited state of feeling, to execute the suggestions of those passions, which at the moment agitate the heart; so in the same desperate manner, as she had before acted, in ridding herself of the danger of Francesca's presence in London, she was now again prompted to grasp at the alternative, which seemed to offer at once, a final means of removing from the path of her peace and happiness, the thorn in her flesh--her Mordecai!

Alas! had not all her jealous, torturing fancies been awakened with still greater force, by the daily sight of Francesca's increasing beauty and attractions, and the words in

Claud's letter—"She will be a lovely woman!" which were ever ringing in her ears like a funereal knell to her happiness? Had not Claud parted from the lovely child with a sigh of regret? would he not return to find her a lovely woman, and to sigh perhaps again, to think that she might have been his—instead of her less lovely sister? There was indeed but one means of averting all this wretchedness; and this was the alternative, which at the same time would ensure Francesca's welfare, and save herself from the humiliation of being despised--eclipsed by her sister's brightness, which even after her own marriage must be continually obscuring her, should Francesca remain unwedded.

Ere long Nice beheld her friend wound up to the mark, to which she had spurred her.

We will not pause to dive into the motives which impelled the Italian girl thus to act. Whether it were the intuitive love of intrigue—a secret wish to triumph over the gentle object of her dislike, Mrs. Gordon, by thus taking out of her

hands, the future destiny of her beloved charge, or the fear of that lady's presence being an obstacle to her purposed machinations—(she knew that if both her nieces married, Mrs. Gordon would retire to Scotland) it would be but a revolting task to follow the mazy labyrinth of her designing mind, through all its plans and devices.

She saw her friend depart with well grounded confidence in her success. This conviction was not founded upon any opinion of Giulia's talents or powers of mind to execute that which she desired; on the contrary she was aware, that in this instance, her strength lay in her weakness and inability to make use of art or skill, on any subject in which her feeling were engaged. This the subtle Nice, with the extraordinary knowledge she had gained of human nature, knew would serve Giulia's purpose on the present occasion—and her conclusions were just.

Lady de Crespigny had proceeded to the

library wound up to a pitch of excitement which deprived her of almost the power of considering what she was about to do. She entered the apartment, and the tall, majestic figure of her guest confronted her at the door. He had been pacing up and down the room—a favorite occupation of those spirits most used to activity of mind and body, when reduced to comparative inaction! Colonel Vavasour paused on the entrance of his young hostess with a quick enquiring glance, in which, perhaps, was visible, a slight shade of less dignified composure than was usual to his noble countenance.

But the sight of him, alone had been sufficient, to recal Giulia to the sense of the delicate and momentous affair which had brought her to his presence—pale and trembling, she stood before him. He evidently waited in expectation of some account of Francesca.

“ How is your sister?” he said regarding her with anxiety.

Giulia's answer was so hesitating and confused, as she advanced towards the table, and sank upon a seat, that following her, Colonel Vavasour exclaimed in a tone of eager alarm—

“Lady de Crespigny—pray tell me at once—your sister is not worse I hope—we must send for advice; it should have been done before this.”

“No, Colonel Vavasour,” cried Giulia preventing him as he was hastening to the door, “my sister is better—much better—but—”

“But what, Lady de Crespigny? what is then the matter? anything in which I can be of use to you, or to—Francesca?” he added in a more subdued tone.

Giulia was weeping.

“Good Heaven, Lady de Crespigny! will you not relieve my dreadful anxiety?” he again cried impetuously, “am I not to be trusted?—your father's friend—the guardian of your sweet sister—only tell me, are those tears on her account?”

"Alas! Colonel Vavasour, they are; but though I did come, with the intent to do, what I considered my duty towards my sister demanded, yet it is so delicate an office, that when it comes to the point, I—I scarcely know whether to you, who are so greatly concerned in the matter, it is consistent with my sister's dignity, that I should reveal the discovery, that I have made."

A deep flush passed over the gallant soldier's face, and then left him very pale.

Her sister's happiness--he whom it so greatly concerned--her sister's dignity, what could all this mean?

A moment's pause ensued.

"Lady de Crespigny," at length spoke that stern commanding voice, which had so often resounded on the field of battle, and now rang imperiously through the sober, still library— "I am a plain, blunt soldier; and though I can make allowance for the delicacy of your sex, I am not fond of circumlocution, and idle

scruples. After having once made up your mind to inform me of what now presses on it, and hearing as I have done, that it regards the happiness of a young being whom I—in whom I—am greatly interested, I must beg—nay desire you, by the authority I hold as her guardian, to tell me truly and unreservedly, whatever it may be."

The awe-struck Giulia faltered forth---

"Colonel Vavasour, I have discovered that—that—she loves you!"

Lady de Crespigny bent her head, almost as much covered with shame and confusion, as if it were her own love she was proclaiming. But in a moment she felt her hand seized and pressed with fervour, whilst a deep voice, tremulous with strong emotion pronounced a blessing upon her.

"Bless you, bless you, Lady de Crespigny, for these words! But let me not deceive myself with what, after all, I can scarcely hope is ought but a mad delusion on my part. Did I rightly

hear--do I really understand--or did my ears and hopes deceive me?" and Colonel Vavasour seated himself by Giulia's side, and gazed earnestly in her face. "Do you really mean to say that the dear angel loves me--loves me as I love her? No that can hardly be, but loves me sufficiently, to allow me to aspire to the joy of becoming her husband--the protector for life of her happiness and welfare."

"Colonel Vavasour," murmured Giulia, but more firmly, as she felt that the first and most difficult step had been overcome, with success beyond her hopes, "I will not conceal from you, that the hope of securing such a protector as yourself, for my orphan sister, one of whom I may well be proud, and whom I would have chosen for her before every other in the world, has made me perhaps too eagerly seize the idea, (suggested by another besides myself,) that of late Francesca's alteration in health and spirits, has been created by the cause I

before mentioned. I have also been led to entertain the hope, that the knowledge I have communicated, would not be altogether unpleasing to your own feelings—still as I am only too much rejoiced to perceive that in this latter case I did not deceive myself—”

“ You think I may venture to entertain the hope ! ” interrupted Colonel Vavasour totally unable to await the termination of this speech. “ At least,” he continued, “ I may be allowed to ask the question, whether your sweet sister will deign to accept the hand of one, who though perhaps unworthy in himself of possessing such lovely gentleness, she will find possesses a heart that can value her love, and cherish her in a manner never before equalled by man. Only let me ask her the simple question—a word—a look from her, and I shall be satisfied ! the slightest doubt on my part that her feelings revolt against the offer, and I would forfeit every hope of happiness in this world rather than allow

myself, or any other being to attempt to influence her in my favor."

" You will allow me however to prepare my sister, for your flattering intentions; in her present nervous state, perhaps—"

" Certainly, certainly, if you think it advisable," again interrupted Colonel Vavasour. " But let it be, I entreat you, Lady de Crespigny, soon. We military men," he continued with a smile, " are great people for despatch; unnecessary suspense is torture. Let it be then to-morrow if your sister is sufficiently recovered. But what does Mrs. Gordon say about it?" he continued anxiously, " is she as kindly disposed in my favor as you are Lady de Crespigny?"

" I do not think," Giulia answered with some hesitation, " that my aunt is aware—"

" Not aware?" interrupted Colonel Vavasour, his countenance falling, " that is strange. I should have imagined that she would have been the first person to discover every circumstance concerning her niece."

"I do not know that," said Giulia somewhat anxiously, "she is accustomed still to look upon Francesca, so much as a child, that she is not likely to understand, or suspect such feelings as others may discern."

"But she is not a child," Colonel Vavasour repeated with some impatience, more in soliloquy than in address to Giulia, as if the thought displeased him, "at her age, many girls marry. And her mind, it may possess the purity of a child, but it is above—far above that of many who are much older. Mind speaks in her countenance—soul is in her very eye."

"The light, the love, the purity of grace,
The mind, the music breathing from that face,
The heart whose softness harmonized the whole,
And oh! that eye was in itself a soul."

Thus might Colonel Vavasour in truth have described this fair girl, for all these attributes were particularly her own.

"May I see Mrs. Gordon?" he then de-

manded eagerly. "Should we not at once let her share in our confidence? She claims the first right to be informed and consulted on every point concerning one, towards whom she has acted such a tender part. Till I have seen and advised with her upon the subject, I shall scarcely dare to hope."

"Not to-night!" said Giulia, shrinking from the idea; for though during this interview with Colonel Vavasour, her conscience had been so far lulled that her heart even flattered itself into the belief, that the pure, unselfish motives he ascribed to her conduct were in reality those which prompted the desire to secure her sister's fate, yet now again she was agitated. The thoughts of how her aunt might construe these motives, filled her with dread; her heart sank also at the fear of what that aunt might do, to prevent an event which she might justly deem a too premature decision of her beloved charge's destiny.

"Not to-night, if you please!" she hastily

said. " My aunt is with Francesca, and does not wish to be disturbed—but to-morrow morning, before I see my sister—"

" To-morrow then!" said Colonel Vavasour, as he wrung Giulia's hand with fervour as she rose to depart. " Oh! may God bless you for your anxiety to promote the happiness of that angel, and for the opinion you are so flattering as to entertain of your father's friend. You command not only my gratitude, but my esteem and admiration; may I also be able to add to these feelings, the affection of a brother?"

Giulia, writhing at this unmerited praise, parted from Colonel Vavasour to seek her friend, to relate to her all that had passed, to listen to her advice and encouragement concerning the completion of the business. And Colonel Vavasour! he might have been seen ere he retired to rest, to enter the gallery, and pause and gaze around him with an expression, such as might have lighted up his countenance,

on visiting some famed spot on the battle field, where for some mighty deed he had won a triumphant name of glory. He stood on the place where Francesca had knelt before him—where he had held her in his arms; he felt in imagination the pressure of that soft brow against his lips—and then he went to dream of all this joy, but more than all, to hear repeatedly sounding in his fancy, the words "*She loves you.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

" To bid thee with another dwell,
Another!—and a braver man
Was never seen in battle's van.

* * * * *
His years need scarce a thought employ,
I would not have thee wed a boy.

* * * * *
In silence bowed the virgin's head ;

* * * * *
And changed her cheek from pale to red
And red to pale, as through her ears
Those winged words like arrows sped,
What could such be but maiden fears?"

THE BRIDE OF AYDOR.

THE next morning the party assembled at breakfast, with the exception of Francesca, who though perfectly recovered from the las

evening's attack, had been desired by her aunt to remain quietly in bed till a later hour.

Mrs. Gordon left the room immediately the meal was over, and Colonel Vavasour, waiting till Nice had also retired, turned to Giulia, and pale, but composed, requested that he might have an audience with her aunt, on the subject of their last night's conference. Giulia arose, and with a tremulous voice, invited him to follow her to the school-room. There they found Mrs. Gordon, who gazed enquiringly on both their anxious countenances, which she had also remarked during breakfast.

Giulia with as much firmness and dignity as she could command, said—

“ Colonel Vavasour wishes to speak to you, and upon a subject, which, dear to her as my sister is, my aunt will, I am sure, consider in the same favorable light, in which I view it.”

Colonel Vavasour then spoke, and with manly, dignified frankness - greatly subdued by his deep, tender interest in the subject, expressed his feelings with regard to her young niece, and entreated for, at least, her countenance and approbation of the step he was about to take.

He did not touch upon the fact of Francesca's suspected preference for himself, which idea, suggested by Giulia, had alone emboldened him to embody into a hope, that which before, had been but as an improbable, though delicious dream of his fancy. His generous heart only wished to sue as an humble *aspirant* to the lovely young being; not a syllable did he utter, which might, in any way, take from her, the dignity of being the first to be wooed.

Surprise for some moments deprived Mrs. Gordon of the power of utterance; and then, when she began by degrees to believe, and understand the reality of what she heard,

there came such a rush of varying emotions to her heart, that agitation still kept her silent, till Colonel Vavasour had finished all he had to say ; and then, confusedly she answered, that she was, certainly, much astonished ; that she could not but appreciate Colonel Vavasour's flattering preference towards her niece, but he must agree with her, that as yet, she was too young to think of matrimony — and, therefore, that it would be more prudent to defer speaking to her on the subject for the present

But Colonel Vavasour now interposed. He would, indeed, have been a phlegmatic lover, had he allowed the prudent scruples of an aunt, to damp entirely those hopes, which had been so strongly raised. Again, with feeling dignity, he entreated Mrs. Gordon, at all events, to allow Francesca to have an interview with him, declaring that he only required to ascertain whether her feelings in the least degree responded to his own ; and then, if

they did not, he would withdraw instantly and for ever, his suit.

Mrs. Gordon could not, with justice, oppose this proposition; indeed, she now only wished the affair terminated as soon as possible; and when Giulia proposed going at once to prepare her sister for the scene which awaited her, and thus give her time for consideration, she did not oppose it. She shrank from taking any part in the business, and even in the perplexity of the moment, felt comfort in the conviction that her loved niece was safe in the hands of such a man as Colonel Vavasour—that he would scorn to take any advantage, which the weak, infatuated jealousy of Giulia might prompt her to pursue, in attempting to influence Francesca against her natural inclination.

Mrs. Gordon, therefore, allowed her to depart on her delicate mission, and was left alone with Colonel Vavasour, with whose evident anxiety and agitation, she could not but sympa-

thize; she only wished Francesca was older, and that she could imagine it possible her niece might return his affection; for he was, indeed, one to whom most proudly and gladly, she would yield her darling charge; but at the present moment, it appeared to her, like matting the lion with the lamb.

They remained for some time in silence. Colonel Vavasour now pacing the room—now seating himself, hastily seizing some book, and endeavouring eagerly to peruse its contents. Giulia had not closed the door after her, and in that direction the Colonel's eyes were constantly wandering. Suddenly a sound met their ears, one long, silvery peal of laughter! It came from Francesca's apartment, only a few doors from where they sat.

The blood rushed over Colonel Vavasour's brow; he leant it upon his hand, and raised it not again. Mrs. Gordon felt for him, but could not herself forbear a smile.

Giulia had found Francesca still in bed. She

lay with her hands clasped over her dark hair, which was matted and wreathed about her head, shewing to full advantage her little face, with its small chiselled features, looking so almost infantine, that Giulia even shrank in spirit from the task she had before considered so feasible; but there was also perceptible, a sort of dreamy languor in her large eyes, fixed upon the budding trees which gently moved without the small paned windows, probably the remains of last evening's indisposition.

" You are better this morning, dear Francesca," said Giulia, embracing her, and the sister's voice was so much more tender than was her wont, that the young girl gazed on her smilingly, and gratefully as she answered,

" Oh, yes, Giulia, dear— quite well, I think."

" And what was it that made you so ill last night?"

Francesca turned her head away, as if she did not like the subject, and murmured—

"I cannot tell you. I hardly know!" and she finished with a slight sigh.

"You were frightened at Colonel Vavasour," Giulia continued with a smile.

"Was I?" asked the young girl, and there was another sigh deeper than the last.

"He is a very good and noble man, Francesca," continued Giulia cautiously after a slight pause, "how honourable - how flattering it must be to be loved by him!"

"And whom does he love?" asked Francesca, abruptly and quickly, as uncovering her face, she fixed her eyes sharply on her sister's face.

"Who? why do you ask?"

"Ah! I do not know," she answered, again turning away, "but I thought it was perhaps you."

"Me---what do you mean?"

"It was only because nurse said to me one day, that every one thought that Colonel Vavasour would make you a good husband. I

do not know why, I am sure," she continued, with a little pettish laugh, " except that you are clever, and learned, and I suppose they thought you worthy of him."

" No, Francesca, it is not me he loves," Giulia gravely rejoined, " it is yourself. Yes," she continued as her sister's eyes were lifted up like those of a startled gazelle, her whole face in a sudden glow, " and not only does he love you, but he wishes to make you his wife."

For one moment, Francesca remained in the sitting posture she had assumed, gazing on her sister with parted lips; then she threw herself back on the pillow, and then came that ringing peal of childish laughter, which had reached the ears of those in the school-room, and which did not please Giulia more than it had done one of that party.

" Francesca! this is a strange way to treat a communication, which ought, in my opinion,

to have caused far deeper feelings than those of merriment and levity."

Francesca had covered her face with her hands as if to stifle her paroxysm of laughter, and Giulia gravely awaited its conclusion. At length all sound died away, her bosom heaved convulsively, her whole frame began to tremble, like an aspen leaf, and soon Giulia beheld the large tears, trickling thick and fast through her fingers.

The sister bent and kissed her brow.

"It is a surprise to you, no doubt, dearest. It was so to me—but a great happiness also, to see my little sister the wife of such a man—one by whom, the greatest, the stateliest ladies of the land would consider themselves but too fortunate, in having been selected as worthy of his choice! You will rise then, my sister, and relieve Colonel Vavasour's anxiety, which, I assure you, is excessive; grant him the interview which he so much desires, and then, he will tell you better than I can, all he feels—and you—"

"Oh, no—no!" sobbed Francesca, again sitting up, and joining her hands with a look of deep distress and alarm.

"Francesca, I have promised Colonel Vavasour that you will see him ; and, therefore, I must beg that you will not childishly refuse to do so. You are not wont to suffer from bashfulness—and you have, I can assure you, already given cause for suspicion, that, in some degree, you return Colonel Vavasour's feelings. I cannot believe, that you intend to despise the offer he is about to make you—"

"Despise ! Despise !" cried Francesca, with a nervous, bitter laugh, her eyes flashing fire.

"What is it then, dear?" said Giulia, soothingly, "what do you feel on the subject?"

"Oh ! I could not tell you---*you* would not understand it," said Francesca, petulantly turning away with an impatient gesture. "Send my aunt," she added.

"I will, Francesca," said Giulia, gently, for her conscience told her, that she had quenched a sister's confidence and affection, by cold suspicions; and, therefore, merited nothing better from her, than similar mistrust on the part of the young girl.

"I will send her," repeated Giulia, "but you must promise me to see Colonel Vavasour, and not to reject his proposal without due consideration. Be assured, you would be greatly blamed by your friends, were you to act rashly in this important matter—although your aunt Gordon may, perchance, fancy you are too young."

"Too young, indeed!" mused Francesca, "certainly, too young, and too little—so far below—but go, Giulia, and send my aunt, she will do me good—and I feel very miserable."



CHAPTER XX.

ELLA. — I've fondly fixed myself upon thee,
Most worthless, and unsuited to thy worth,
Like a poor weed on some proud turret's brow,
I wave, and nod, and kiss the air around thee,
But cannot be like thee.

RODRIG. — Heaven bless thee, little flower ! I prize thee more
Than all the pride of female stateliness!

ELLA — Dost thou ? then I am happy—I am proud,
I will not wish me other than I am.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

GIULIA entered the school-room, and requested
Mrs. Gordon to go to her sister ; Colonel Va-
vasour arose, but in somewhat a desponding

manner. With as much cheerfulness as she could assume, the Baroneess told him, that her sister would see him as soon as she was dressed. He asked no more, but retired to the library.

Francesca was soon weeping hysterically on her aunt's bosom, whilst her fond friend, with soothing kind words, bade her not give way to such agitation.

"What have you to fear, dearest child? speak to Colonel Vavasour as you would to me, he wishes but for your happiness."

"Aunt Gordon tell me, did not Giulia mock me, when she told me—"

"Mock you! no darling, it is all true, but then you need not fear that Colonel Vavasour will be offended, he is good and kind, he knows that you are very young, and—"

"Offended!" Francesca exclaimed, "he must not be offended."

"Then you will tell him the real truth," her aunt continued.

"Oh! I could not—I should die before the glance of that eye," she cried despairingly.

"Then I am sure he will not require any sacrifice from you against which your feelings revolt—tell me all you think, and I will convey your sentiments to him."

"Tell *you*, aunt," exclaimed Francesca, almost passionately, "can you not imagine—can you not tell what they *must* be? *Tell* them! as soon could I pourtray in words, the feelings which bent me down at his feet in the gallery last evening—the feelings which must have been too intense for my weak heart, for it seemed to crush it; and it was this strong feeling I suppose which caused me to faint, as they say I did."

"No, my dear child, it was because your nerves were not in a very strong state," said Mrs. Gordon beginning scarcely to know what to think. "You will not feel the same, when you again see Colonel Vavasour; and he is so calm, so gentle, and withal so kind,

he will understand at once all that you would express, and spare you the pain of long explanations. Still my Francesca must remember that she is no longer in the position of a child, but a woman, and must summon to her aid, all the dignity and proper pride which ought to belong to one ; particularly in a situation of such importance as that in which you now stand, little lady," said Mrs. Gordon smiled upon her niece. " It is one, let me tell you, of which most women would be proud, rather than dismayed. But I will send nurse," she added, as she saw Francesca more calm, but evidently confused and bewildered, scarcely comprehending what she heard ; and nurse, little knowing what was going forward, with her young lady, (who she still regarded almost in the same light as when she first took charge of the little girl years ago,) entering at that moment, Mrs. Gordon left Francesca to perform the duties of the toilette.

In about an hour's time, Francesca passed from her room along the corridor into the gallery, looked for a moment at that same spot on which Colonel Vavasour had gazed the night before, then darted off, and prepared to descend the great staircase.

It was however with a timid, lingering step. Her face too was pale as ivory, except when there flitted over it a delicate flush. But yet her feelings might not be likened to those of any other young lady in a similar position. She was proceeding of her own accord from her apartment to seek Colonel Vavasour, more like an innocent child, who with timid, confiding anxiety wishes to unburthen herself of some grief, or to confess some fault pressing painfully on her young heart—to pour forth her feelings to some one whom she trusts, though fears. Francesca paused at the library door, put her little trembling hand upon the lock ; it moved—she withdrew it, knowing however that she must have been heard ; again

she collected all her courage and opened it—gave one timid glance around, then glided slowly forwards.

Colonel Vavasour arose on beholding her enter, whilst all the blood seemed to rush to his heart; he could not even advance to meet her.

Strange influence which love will exercise over the noblest, even the sternest natures—well may the gentle sex glory in their power! the bold, the lion hearted soldier was prostrate in strength, vanquished to feebleness, and by the mere presence of a diminutive girl of sixteen.

But when the young girl stood close before him, when he looked at the sweet face, and heard her gentle voice utter some inarticulate sound, Colonel Vavasour felt nought but a gush of the deepest tenderness, all expressed in the gaze of his noble eye.

His voice softened to the lowest murmur as he pronounced the word “Francesca!”



And Francesca, she had remembered her aunt's injunctions. Some feeling whispered to her that it was time she should be dignified, nay even proud. She had therefore erected her little form to its full height—had even raised her eyes, as she thought, very haughtily to Colonel Vavasour's face when she first stood before him. But that look of love—her name pronounced as none before had ever spoken it! In another instant she had sunk upon the ground. She was seated at his feet, weeping and trembling like a little drooping primrose, at the foot of a sturdy oak.

Colonel Vavasour was, as it were, thunderstruck. He could not see her thus; it distressed him, and yet now he dared not presume to raise her—he could only pray, and entreat her to rise.

"Miss de Crespigny let me implore you—Francesca—do not weep—why is all this? This is not right," he continued, using in his

despair the commanding tone he could render so imposing, "let me *beg* of you to rise."

It had its effect; Francesca started up, the tears ceased, and she gazed with fear into his face—but she read no sternness there—only deep—deep anxiety.

Colonel Vavasour took her hand, and with respect led her to a chair, seated himself by her side, and with manly frankness, yet every word and tone suiting the delicacy of her with whom he had to deal, told her all relating to his own feelings, and requested her truthfully and fearlessly to reveal her own.

"One word, dear Francesca, will be enough," he said, as trembling and with hesitation, she moved her lips as if to speak, and then hung her head in silence.

"One word," he again repeated, "to tell me whether or not you feel towards me as I could wish—say yes or no! I will not ask more, for Francesca is truth and openness itself."

"One word," exclaimed Francesca with earnestness, "one word will not explain what *I* feel."

"But it will prove, dearest Francesca, whether or not you will consent to be mine *for ever!*"

"*For ever!*" she repeated, raising her eyes with a radiant smile, but more in soliloquy than addressed to him.

"Yes, my own Francesca—mine *for ever*—my wife—my treasure—to be loved---oh! how loved!"

Francesca wept—her head now resting for support on Colonel Vavasour's bosom.

"My darling, say you love me."

"Love you!" she sobbed, "it is not love."

"Not love!" Colonel Vavasour repeated, recoiling, "what then? nought but love Francesca will suffice."

"Alas, alas! then would you have me feel as I do to all around me? I cannot help it, for I do not—cannot love you in that manner."

"How then, my sweet one?"

"I will try to tell you, but you will perhaps think me wicked, you may spurn such impious love. It is a feeling, partaking of veneration, too strong for an earthly love, too like idolatry, worshipping the creature too fervently; such a feeling it was that made me kneel to you last night, and this morning I was obliged to pray—oh! how fervently, that your image might not come before my eyes, and steal my thoughts from God."

It was all over now — Colonel Vavasour demanded no further testimony; it was not for him to quarrel with such idolatry—nay, perhaps he began to feel that it could scarcely now be called by that name—since one cannot be at once the worshipper and the worshipped, and the worshipped she must now feel herself to be, in every look and tone of him to whom she had confessed her idolatry. He no longer feared the scruples of the aunt. Francesca was old enough to love him—why then not sufficiently old to become his wife?

This was an incontrovertible argument which even Mrs. Gordon could not gainsay, especially when her little Francesca clung to her caressingly, and reproached her for not glorying in her blissful fortune. How could she but smile in the midst of the tears which would fall at the prospect of the early marriage of her darling niece?

Colonel Vavasour set off to London to report the good use he had made of the short period he had been in office.

Surprise there might be, but no opposing sentiments could exist to such an alliance, and on hearing that the beautiful Miss de Crespigny, in her seventeenth year, was about to be married, every one agreed in her great, good fortune, in having been chosen by the noble and gallant hero, Colonel Vavasour.

CHAPTER XXI.

"They tell me, gentle lady, that they deck thee for a bride,
That the wreath is woven for thy hair, the bridegroom by thy
side,

* * * * *

And when I think how often I have seen thee with thy mild
And lovely look, and step of air, and bearing like a child,
Oh! how mournfully, how mournfully the thought comes
o'er my brain,

When I think thou ne'er may'st be, that free and girlish thing
again."

FITZGERALD.

IT was the beginning of July when Claud Hamilton returned to England, having obtained his dismissal somewhat earlier than he

expected. At the age of twenty-five he returned to fulfil an engagement, formed not certainly with that willing impulsive spirit of love which makes such an anticipation so delightful; but (as the fabled Midas whose touch turned all to gold) there are some happy buoyant spirits who are disposed rather to cast the reflection of their own bright feelings over every event, which in the stream of their existence meet their course, however gloomy occasionally they may appear—who in short make the best of all things. And so it was with Claud Hamilton, who returned to England ready to undertake with cheerfulness, the destiny which awaited him, and to fulfil conscientiously the duties and obligations it would entail upon him, perfectly aware that all the worldly advantages that awaited him, were not at all to be despised, or in any way displeasing possessions.

He had heard nothing but praises of his affianced bride—how munificently she had

behaved! The first use she had made of her independence was, in the most delicate and judicious manner, to assist Mr. Hamilton in a very material way with regard to financial arrangements ; and Claud, penetrated with gratitude for this act of kindness towards his family, determined that Giulia should never find him forgetful of all he owed to her—a debt impossible to repay, but by affection and attention on his part !

On Claud's arrival in London, he found that his father had already been obliged to depart for Shirley Hall, but his mother was awaiting him in Portman Square, though she was obliged to set off the following morning, to be in time to attend the wedding of Francesca, to which of course she would be accompanied by her son.

“ The wedding of Francesca !” how strange this sounded in his ears.

Great indeed had been his surprise on hearing a short time before of the intended event,

and the more he now talked it over with his mother, the more the singularity of the fact seemed to strike him.

"What a hurried business it appears to be!" he said, "why could they not have waited a little longer? she is so very young."

"Oh! I can assure you," replied Mrs. Hamilton, "that Colonel Vavasour is a very ardent lover, and Giulia seemed to wish to have it over before her own marriage takes place; in short we all think long engagements are very tiresome, useless affairs; except they are unavoidable, as in your case. You see Annie's and Lord Beverley's match was soon completed, and even Gertrude's—as it was to be, I got over as quickly as possible. I hate lovers about the house, particularly poor parsons. So I packed them off to their "love in a parsonage," which I assure you Gertrude contrives to make a very pretty abode. You will meet them both at Shirley; Mr. Seymour is to perform the ceremony."

Shirley!—at the mention of the name, Claud's thoughts flew back to past days, and he felt a strange feeling of depression at his heart.

"I wish this marriage had been over before I went there," he said, "weddings are always dismal affairs; one's own must be quite enough."

It did seem very strange to Claud Hamilton to find himself once more in that old mansion, the memory of which had always haunted his imagination, the same gloom still pervading its old walls, which summer even failed to dispel; the brightness without, perhaps only rendering the sombre stillness within more striking. But still Claud could scarcely feel that he was in the same place he had quitted six years ago. Perhaps because—

"It is our feelings give their tone
To whatsoever we gaze upon."

And certainly Claud Hamilton's feelings could not be considered the same now, as they were

then; for though, happy those, whose hearts had suffered no greater change, still he had, since that time, *seen* the world, *felt* the world, and he even wore around him a web of that world's weaving. But there were also outward circumstances to make him feel the change, that first morning of his arrival at Shirley Hall.

Where was the fairy child, to him of old the lovely spirit of that place, and without whom it could scarcely be the same? She was not to be seen fluttering about; for her merry voice he listened in vain. When too, he sat down to dinner, it was in one of the large apartments prepared for the occasion, but which he remembered in former times darkened and unfurnished, echoing with no sounds but occasionally those of Francesca's laughing terror as he chased her in its gloom.

A large party was assembled in that sombre room—and more than all, there was the broken spirited girl of former days, with grave dignity doing the honours of the house; and he

seated by her side not as then, the good-natured encouraging friend, the alleviator of her neglected childhood, but in the character of her engaged suitor. And then again to think on what occasion they had assembled!

"Colonel Vavasour," said Lady de Cressigny at the conclusion of the dinner, "do you not agree with me that my sister had better be kept quite quiet this evening. Mr. Claud Hamilton," she added with a smile and slight erection of the head, that spoke of consciousness as she pronounced the name, "is as you know, an old friend; but still more on that account, might a meeting be agitating."

"Perhaps so," replied Colonel Vavasour with a very happy, proud smile, "but from the account Lady Beverley has been giving me, I think there is not much serious agitation to be apprehended."

"No indeed," remarked Mrs. Hamilton laughing, "except when dear good Mrs. Gordon looks pathetic and makes affecting speeches,

it would be difficult to tell which is the bride elect, Francesca or her little bridesmaids, (these were Mrs. Hamilton's two youngest girls) who try on all the pretty dresses in turn with her, and peep into the chapel from the gallery to watch the preparations."

A choaking sensation came into Claud's throat at these words, and a moisture to his eyes.

There was, however, rather a different scene to the one just described, enacted by Francesca before the end of the evening, when the excitement of the day was over and it drew near the time of retiring to rest, for the last time, in her own little room through her aunt Gordon's apartment. The colour was seen fading gradually from her cheek, the spirit from her eye, and the ladies on going up stairs, found her seated, in the midst of all her gay, bridal paraphernalia weeping bitterly.

Mrs. Gordon had left her, unable to restrain

her own strong emotion, and Mrs. Rivers stiff and stately was standing by, speaking words which sounded but harsh reproof to the little Hamiltons who sat by Francesca's side in silent dismay; but she, who knew her so well, felt they were intended to allay her feelings and to reassure her.

She was, however, more effectually roused by the entrance of comparative strangers, such as Mrs. Hamilton and her elder daughters—The gentle Annie who we now meet as Lady Beverley, a happy wife to a most devoted husband, whom she moreover ruled most thoroughly with her quiet rod of meekness, she was also mother to a lovely boy. And the pretty Gertrude was there also—the clergyman's wife, but *such* a clergyman's wife! She was attired in a toilette no less *recherché* than that of her Countess sister. It might have happened that Mr. Hamilton had not been quite judicious in her choice of the wedding trousseau, and had provided for the clergyman's bride, dresses scarcely suited to her situation; but, whatever,

might have been the case, Gertrude certainly did not form our *beau ideal* of a clergyman's wife. The fine lady seemed to cling pertinaciously to her, as she reclined listlessly on a sofa with her ornamented smelling bottle in her hand, talking of the embroidered robes, and lace caps, which she had ordered from London for her expected infant.

Her husband too, the grave, wise Seymour, who in every other respect, would not on any consideration have swerved in the slightest degree from the consistent life encumbent on one of his sacred profession, even he, gazed contentedly upon his pretty wife, and listened to all her trivial, worldly talk, with far too much of feelings savouring of carnal pride and pleasure.

Mrs. Hamilton was very much amused at this specimen of the parson's wife, which she had turned out of her school—it served Mr. Seymour right, she said, for presuming to think of one of *her* daughters. He had, however, the

promise of a living in Lady de Crespigny's gift, now held by Dr. Manvers, lately become very apoplectic, and had already been appointed Chaplain to his wife's future sister-in-law.

Thus Claud was continually reminded of the benefits his intended alliance had drawn upon almost every branch of his family. And as he sat by Giulia's side that evening, he did not forget all this; he was angry with himself for not being able to shake off a feeling of depression, which seemed to weigh down the power of appearing either ardent or cheerful, in his attentions, and which sensation the careless gaiety of those around him only served to increase. For with the exception of Giulia and Mr. Hamilton, and the latter was engaged with Colonel Vavasour on matters of business--there were none of the party sufficiently intimate with the young bride elect, to suffer much from the same feeling of interest. Claud seemed to hear nothing but the careless speeches which floated on his ear, as if he were

dreaming, of arrangements connected with the marriage of which Francesca seemed so strangely the heroine. He was quite ashamed of the feeling he experienced when the door was pushed open and Arno entered—for he started up as if he fancied the dog must be followed by his little mistress—not so much in the person of the pretty child he had last beheld at Shirley, but as the fairy Peri of Portman Square who had left an impression on his mind ever since, as—

“ One of those forms which fit by us, when we
Are young, and fix our eyes on every face;
And oh ! the loveliness at times we see
In momentary gliding, the soft grace—
The youth, the bloom, the beauty which agree,
In many a nameless being we retrace
Whose course and home we know not, nor shall know,
Like the lost Pleiad seen no more below.”

But he saw her not that night—he saw her not till the following morning, and then how---and where?

CHAPTER XXII.

"Come, sweetest come !
The holy vow shall tremble on thy lip,
And at God's blessed altar shalt thou kneel
So meek and beautiful, that men will deem
Some angel there doth pray."

ANONYMOUS.

IT was in the ancient chapel, now decked with flowers, that Claud beheld Francesca. He had led in Giulia followed by a young and smiling party, who arranged themselves round the altar where Mr. Seymour in his clerical dress awaited them.

There was a breathless, awful pause, during which Claud's attention was only diverted once, by his eye falling accidentally on a face he had not yet seen since his arrival at Shirley.

It was that of the Italian girl; but, though he might have remarked a moment before, if he had looked at her, that she was observing, stealthily, his countenance, with a very peculiar expression, her eyes were then bent with quiet humility, on the ground.

A firm, manly tread was now heard echoing down the aisle, and Colonel Vavasour, accompanied by a brother officer, somewhat pale, but firm and dignified, passed the group, and took his place by the altar. Another pause still more breathless, but at last, Claud heard a low sound by his side—it was Giulia weeping!

The next moment a murmur met his ear, and Claud, as if through a dim haze which seemed to obscure his sight, discerned a small form led towards them, between his father and Mrs. Gordon.

A white veil streamed over her, almost entirely concealing both form and face; her large, wild eyes, gazing fearfully and bashfully around, gleamed from beneath the transparent covering.

The trio passed close to Claud, and then there was a moment's delay—for one little arm clung tightly around that of Mrs. Gordon, who gently strove to disengage herself from the hold.

Colonel Vavasour looked with an air of entreaty upon Francesca, and then she relaxed her grasp; Mr. Hamilton led her before the centre of the altar, and she stood by the side of her affianced husband, weeping and trembling, whilst that solemn marriage service commenced.

It was now, for the first time, that Claud began to realize the idea, that they were there gathered together, to behold that man and woman joined together in the holy bands of matrimony—nor was it till a young voice, which,

even through its weeping utterance, he could well recognise, as the never forgotten notes of his sweet playmate repeated — “I, Francesca,” and the words that followed, (to which her heart seemed to respond--from the earnest fervour by which they gradually were breathed forth) not till then did he begin to feel that in the person of that “woman,” he really beheld the sportive child of Shirley Hall—the youthful, joyous beauty of the London ball-room !

But he now seemed to understand, as if for the first time, how it all really was, and the strange sort of bewilderment passed away. In a few minutes, he was in the midst of the little crowd surrounding the bride and bridegroom, pressing forward with the others, to offer his congratulations to the young wife, now clinging to the arm of her noble, happy-looking husband.

And his words of compliment received from her more consideration, than any other of the

various kind speeches that were poured into her ear.

With her own affectionate warmth of manner, she extended her hand towards him; and with a blushing smile, seemed to welcome him as a friend and brother—and Claud, in a tone in which was blended the playful cheerfulness of former days, and the most earnest, heartfelt feelings, breathed the words—

“ God bless you, Mrs. Vavasour !”

The expression was heard by Colonel Vavasour, and there seemed something in the manner in which it was spoken, which vibrated gratefully to his heart, for, with a pleased smile, he frankly, and cordially, shook hands with the young man, and Francesca gave a little nervous laugh, at hearing herself, for the first time, called by her new title ; and then less slowly, and more with her own buoyant step, she was led from the chapel by her gallant spouse, the others following in procession.

The bride did not appear again in public, till dressed in the most unique specimen of Mrs. Hamilton's taste, she made her entrance into the great Hall, where the whole household were assembled to witness her departure.

She had taken leave of those she most loved, a fact, that could well be discerned, from the expression of her countenance. She was calm, however, but raised not her long eye-lashes sweeping her cheek; and, after curtseying slightly to those around her, she proceeded between Mr. Hamilton and Colonel Vavasour, to the door—old Hector quietly walking after them, and Arno joyfully bounding backwards and forwards before his young mistress.

Claud and some of the gentlemen followed the party into the court.

The bride had been handed, or rather lifted into the carriage, and affectionately embraced by her elder guardian, but there seemed some

little delay. The bridegroom had not followed, but stood looking in by Mr. Hamilton's side apparently discussing some point.

Claud approached to see what was the matter.

"My darling," he heard Colonel Vavasour say, "you shall have it again, very soon."

"But he will be so unhappy," said a crying voice, "he has never been separated from me for a long—long month ; how he puts his little head upon my shoulder, and he looks at me so piteously. Ah ! you are very cruel, Colonel Vavasour — Well, take him away — but I know I shall cry all the way."

"Well, let it be, Francesca, if it is to make you so very unhappy," said Colonel Vavasour, in a resigned tone, as he entered the carriage ; "you see already, Mr. Hamilton, what a victim I am."

Mr. Hamilton laughed, and stepping back, Claud saw Francesca with Arno on her knee, the little creature pressing close to its mis-

tress in evident terror, at the fear of being removed.

But he was not suffered to remain. Francesca herself, put the dog from her, saying firmly—

“No, take it away, it shall *not* go with us,” and Claud stepped forward to receive Arno in his arms.

“Ah, Claud! Yes, you used to be very fond of him—take him to dear aunt Gordon, and tell her I send him to comfort her, till she sees her little Francesca again. I would not for the world, do what you dislike,” she added, with a sweet smile, turning to Colonel Vavasour, and placing her hand upon his.

The carriage was, in another instant, grinding through the court-yard, and Claud re-entered the house with Arno in his arms.

In about two months, the papers announced the marriage of Claud Hamilton and the Baroness De Crespigny.

The event took place in London.

We will not trouble our readers with the details of a second bridal. Lady De Crespigny was given away by her brother-in-law, Colonel Vavasour, who returned from his wedding expedition just in time for the occasion.

END OF VOL II

THE
BOSOM FRIEND.
A NOVEL,

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“THE GAMBLER’S WIFE,” “THE YOUNG PRIMA DONNA,”
&c., &c., &c.

“A bosom serpent—a domestic evil !”

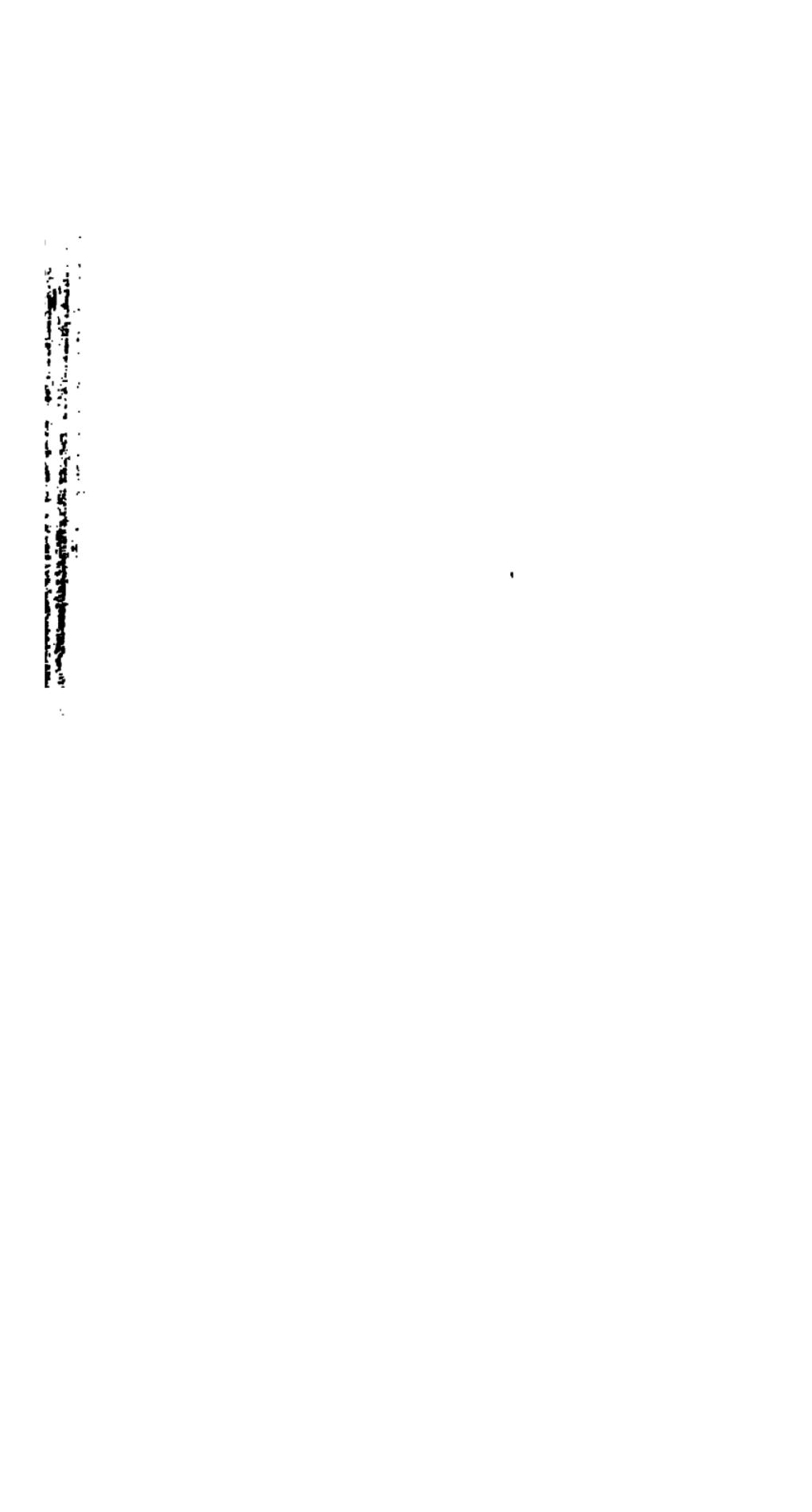
POPE.

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
T. C. NEWBY, 72, MORTIMER ST. CAVENDISH Sq.

—
1845.



THE
BOSOM FRIEND.

CHAPTER L

“ The house, i’troth, is silent now,
And hath a look of gloom—
I can remember when there were lights
And music in every room.”

MARY HOWITT.

“ But who was she, the lady of the dead?
Was she chaste and fair?
How lived—how loved—how died she?”

CHILDE HAROLD.

COLONEL and Mrs. Vavasour, had spent the two first months of their married life on the Continent, which having been so lately opened

to the English, was much resorted to at this time.

Somewhat reluctantly they returned to England, in order to attend the marriage of Lady De Crespigny.

Francesca arrived with her young imagination glowing with delight at the recollection of all the novel beauties she had beheld.

Claud and Giulia, anxious to adopt in their own case, a plan which had seemed so productive of pleasure to others, after a few days passed at their seat in Berkshire, intended also to make a continental tour. During their absence from England, extensive improvements would be going on, at Beechlands, which would prevent its being eligible as a residence, for, at least, a year.

Shirley Hall was, indeed, becoming too dilapidated and incommodious for a family, and the time was fast approaching, when, probably,

Mrs. Rivers would again become its chief inmate.

The old mansion was, truly, unsuited, from its gloom and desolation, to be the residence of the two young married people; at least, so all thought and advised, with respect to Claud and Giulia; though no one seemed to feel any anxiety on the subject of the effect such solitude might produce upon the other pair, Francesca and Colonel Vavasour, when, after a month's stay in London, they set off to spend a few days at the Hall.

It did appear somewhat strange to Francesca, to find herself at Shirley, under such different circumstances. No aunt Gordon there to receive her—for she had parted with that dear relation in London, who, after having spent some time with her darling Francesca, had set off on a pilgrimage to Scotland, having promised her nieces to meet them at Shirley in the spring. She departed blaming herself, for having lamented almost

as a misfortune, that which had proved in its fulfilment, so great a blessing. Her beloved charge had, indeed, gained a protector; the fervent prayers of the aunt had been answered, for in the husband of the young girl, Mrs. Gordon saw with joy and gratitude, one, who truly might be her protector —her support in weal and woe — her guide and comforter! She would be shielded from the dangers of life, by the powerful protection of a loving, watchful, and devoted husband, shrouded by whose care, it seemed as if no breath of the world could reach or sully her. And the young wife clung to her noble partner as the ivy round the oak, trusting, rejoicing in the imprisonment which bound her in every thought, feeling, and affection, to *him* she so venerated. But Nice, where was she in the midst of so much happiness?

The Italian girl had been present at the wedding of her friend, and had been kindly

noticed by Claud, who found it difficult to recognize in the retiring, humble Nice, the once fierce, bold beauty, whose conduct had been so repellant to his feelings; and he could do no less than join graciously, in the hope affectionately expressed by Giulia in her presence, that Nice would meet them on their return to Shirley, whenever that might be.

In the meantime, she had been invited by the Marchesa, who was about to return to her native country, to accompany her there, and she had accepted the offer, having no other alternative save that of boarding in a convent, an idea she in no way relished. Her uncle was also to accompany them for the present, but as his new connection in England would oblige him to be chiefly a resident in that country, Nice would always have an opportunity of returning at her pleasure. She now too had no fear of his pressing her on the point of the convent. The Priest found the girl too useful an instrument for the furtherance of his vari-

ous designs, to confine her powers within the narrow limits of a cloister.

Although for a time Fra Paolo had been passive in the business, he had by no means given up all hope of the conversion of the Baroness, of whose unstable mind he had gained but too great experience; and with a deep foreknowledge, which even surprised the crafty Jesuit, his young relative had advised and encouraged him concerning the events and time, which were to afford a more accessible road, than had before been open to him, of final success.

And the consequences to Nice were indeed important to her future happiness, for her uncle had promised to her in recompense for her services, should they be crowned with success—perfect liberty to dispose of herself, according to her own pleasure.

Francesca found herself in her former home alone with her husband, and though it did seem strange to look around and not see

the kind affectionate countenance of her excellent aunt beaming upon her as in former days, she still felt rejoiced to be once more at a home, which, with all its gloom, to her had ever appeared bright and happy—and now again amidst her birds and flowers the same girlish spirit danced in her heart; but her mind seemed exalted, and raised. She no longer felt inclined as before, to start up from her occupations and fly about the rambling house for amusement;—yet she was happier—oh! how far happier than she had ever been or dreamt ever of being; now sometimes her heart felt so full of joy that it seemed to overflow, and her eyes to fill with tears, which she would laugh at herself for shedding.

“Mrs. Rivers do you not think I am grown very sedate lately?” she said one day, when her husband being busy writing letters of business, and not able to restrain herself from interrupting him by her chatter if she remained by his side, she had glided from the

library into the gallery and seated herself in the window seat with Arno at her feet, her eyes wandering over every object which she could associate with a certain day she never could forget.

Mrs. Rivers was sailing past her, but stopped on being thus addressed.

She bent her eyes with a somewhat dubious expression on a face which certainly bore in its joyous look, no signs of anything like sedateness.

"Why you cannot wish me to be more so I am sure, Mrs. Rivers," the little lady continued, "you would not have me look like those stiff women on the wall."

"No, Mrs. Vavasour, at your age, stiffness as you call it, is not expected," Mrs. Rivers answered, her countenance not in the least degree moving from its customary rigidity, "nor is it necessary as you *now* are, that your youthful spirits should be checked—I mean alone in the company of your husband, who I

rejoice to see, meets from you, the proper degree of love, honour and obedience due from a wife to a husband."

" Yes indeed, Mrs. Rivers, he never finds any fault in me, and would indeed be miserable if I were to become any graver or quieter ; so " the little wife continued archly, " I always intend to be as merry, and if I can manage it, as pretty looking as that lady in the corner, for Colonel Vavasour admires her so very much. By the bye, I find he knows all about her history and I wanted him to tell me what made you shake your head, when people said she was like me; but he only smiled, and said that I possessed all the curiosity of my mother Eve, and that I had better ask you. I must be old enough now to hear everything, as I am married; so pray satisfy my long desired wish of knowing all about that pretty lady, whose example you are so anxious I should avoid."

" Young lady," said Mrs. Rivers in a most solemn tone, " if your husband objects not to

the communication, it is not for *me* to withhold it, and perhaps it is as well, that ere you go into a delusive world, you should know something of the sin and sorrow that lurk beneath its fairest appearance, in order that you may beware of the snares, most often prepared for the fair and young like you, lady.' Many have fallen," the old woman continued, mournfully shaking her head, "too many alas from their very ignorance of evil!"

"How dreadful," said Francesca, "you frighten me! but when I go to the drawing rooms and balls in London, if you mean that, Mrs. Rivers, I shall have my husband by my side, and thus guarded, what can I have to fear?"

"Mrs. Vavasour," said the old house-keeper her usually steady voice slightly trembling, "that will be the time, against which you must study a deportment very different, from the unrestrained manner you display with impunity in the freedom of this old hall: you

will find in the world, others to witness your behaviour, to comment on it, who will be far less lenient than the partial eyes of your husband, and the friends of your childhood. You cannot be ever by your husband's side; the fashion and the business of the world will prevent it; you must act like the rest—at least, so those said with whom I once lived, and who understood it far too well; and the world has not, I fear, improved since then. There, it will be imagined, young lady, that innocent thoughtlessness of manner, is, or at least, will soon become, levity and folly. And then—God preserve you and save you from the perils, which befel that fair creature, of whom with grief and shame I am about to speak!"

Mrs. Rivers's stern eye actually glistened with a tear, and she was forced to clear her voice ere she could proceed.

Francesca drew one of the large, old fashioned chairs close to her seat in the window, and made the old woman sit down;

Slowly and silently she obeyed, and the bright sun streaming through the stained glass fell upon the two figures. The ancient dame in her sober black dress—her stiff and stately high-crowned cap, under which her white hair was formally arranged! Sternly marked was every feature of her wrinkled face, and severe was the expression of her grey eyes, which gleamed through a pair of silver mounted spectacles. They were fixed upon the countenance of the young creature who sat before her, bending forward in the attitude of deep attention.

What a contrast between youth and blooming hopes—age and sorrowful experience! Francesca with her clear large eyes opened to their widest extent, from the mixed feeling of interest and alarm beating at her heart—her white smooth skin and rosy lips, the curls of bright hair, telling of youth's first prime, falling upon her fair shoulders! She truly seemed like the beautiful Spring with

all its buds and flowers, and the old woman might be likened to stern winter with its accompaniments, gloom and decay!

"Be quick, dear Mrs. Rivers," exclaimed Francesca, "I am expiring with curiosity to hear the story."

"Well then," the old woman began, "you must know that I once loved dearly that beautiful creature whose picture hangs in that neglected corner. She was my foster sister, and also a de Crespigny. I was brought up with her, and when as gay and young as you are now, she married her cousin, your father's uncle, then the heir of this house. I came with her more as a companion than a servant to this old hall.

"It was a very different looking place then. Oh! you would not have known it for the same! The walls echoed with the sounds of glad voices—and gay doings. Music, and dancing, and acting, and masquerading went on unceasingly, during those merry making times when the house was full of company, to do

honour to the young creature who till then had lived in perfect solitude in her father's quiet home, with me for her sole companion; till, as I said, your great uncle married her, as noble a gentleman as I ever saw, excepting I must say your own husband, young lady.

" Ah ! how fair and pure and innocent in heart she seemed at that period, and how her husband delighted in her gaiety and beauty ! It was just at that time that the picture was taken in her masquerade dress—it was painted by a great artist who came down for the purpose."

" After this, alack ! alack ! she went to London—that Babylon of iniquity ! I did not go with her. Her mother-in-law, the then Lady de Crespigny, took a great fancy to me, and I remained behind with her. I soon after married the steward's son. We heard of Mrs. de Crespigny as the greatest beauty at court, and the gayest of the gay, and after the London season was over she came back to Shirley

more lovely than ever in form and face—but in heart—alas! alas!

“There were mirth and revelry again resounding through these old walls, such as never have been heard since—and she was again the spirit and life of all—but the spirit was not the same—no, I soon saw that—and I found that the breath of the world had dimmed the innocence of her heart. I knew not however the festering wound it had left there—and her husband, he saw it not—his eyes were blinded by his love; he was too good and true himself, to suspect one so dear to his soul, and she now used her former innocence of manner to veil her present change of feeling.

“But we knew it all, ah me! too soon! Young lady, there was one amongst those guests, with whom in her first innocent gaiety of heart she had lightly laughed and jested, thinking no evil. But he was evil—and the world in which she had met him was evil—and ere she knew it, she had become evil too.

Her mirth and gaiety were innocence no more ; the very mind and conscience were defiled—she could now call evil good ; and good evil. She loved her husband no more ; she who had sworn at the altar to love him, and him alone, till death did them part—*loved another !*

Through her listener's parted lips there issued an exclamation of horror.

“ Yes, you well may exclaim—well may your cheek grow pale. But now veil your face, for still greater shame must it express—and pray that you may be preserved safe in a world like this, where the purest innocence can so quickly sink into the deepest guilt.”

Francesca did indeed hide her face with terror. The sepulchral tone of voice with which the old woman told the sad tale, added to its pathos and solemnity ; she felt that she had heard too much already. What could come next ?

"Mr. de Crespigny," Mrs. Rivers continued, "was obliged to leave Shirley Hall on pressing business—it was but for a few days. He returned and as usual asked immediately for his wife, oh! what had we to tell him?

"She was gone—she had betrayed, forsaken him—she had fled with another. In the dead of night she had passed from her chamber, and by the secret stair-case stole even through the holy house of God---that chapel where she might have seen frowning as it were upon her, the commandment she was about to break, with a villain black and treacherous—but not more so than herself. No! the words which you may read traced upon the back of that picture are truer than ever poetry before uttered—

"The sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds,
Lilies that fester, are far worse than weeds."

Francesca had now in the excitement of her feelings sunk upon her knees before the old woman, and raising her streaming eyes to

wards her, sobbed out in the greatest agitation—

“ She could not—she could not do so!—she was a wife, and he was so good, you say, and noble—like my husband—and she could leave him? Ah, why did you tell me this? I shall never look up again as I have done—for I never knew till now, that a woman *could* do such a thing!—And he,” she continued speaking very rapidly, “ did he not follow and *kill* her? she deserved it!” the young wife cried, her eyes flashing almost fiercely.

“ No, her punishment was far worse—she killed *him*. She broke his heart. He had not strength to curse her—nor indeed had he the inclination. He died here in this house, and she lived in sin for years, and then died in poverty and ruin. And now smile no more young lady, when I speak of the soberness befitting a wife, to one like you, who are so inexperienced—so childlike; think of me no longer as the cross old woman who, ever from your earliest years, checked with severity, that

liveliness of character in which others delighted. A terrible example was before my eyes, and seeing you growing up, daily more and more like in person, to her, your relative both by birth and marriage, whom I so loved in her days of innocence, I dreaded for you the evils which thoughtless gaiety often engenders. My manner is I know rough and stern, but I mean well towards you, my dear young lady—I have had many sorrows. The sudden death of my husband soon after these calamities—the solitude of my life in this old house which has never since been inhabited, as it used to be by the family, have made me doubtless gloomy and morose."

Francesca now arose, but her countenance was sadly altered since she had listened to this tale, and she murmured her thanks but faintly, for that for which before she had so eagerly sued. It was as if for the first time she knew and felt, that sin was in the world in all its hideousness, and it seemed to weigh down with a vague dread, her innocent heart.

Like Coleridge's wedding guest, after having heard the ancient Mariner's fearful tale she—

“ Went like one that has been stunned
And is of sense forlorn—”

sadder certainly though wiser, to seek her husband—ashamed and sorrowful, to tell him the dreadful story she had heard. And he wiped her tears and smiled at her grief, though in his heart, the husband loved, admired and honoured her more than ever.

“But why should you grieve about it, my sweet girl?” he said; “although there is sin in the world, it need not approach you--nor will it I am sure. I could with confidence leave you for years, and have no fear that you had ceased to love me or to honour and obey me, although you do, you little naughty girl, threaten to become disobedient.”

“ Ah !” she exclaimed earnestly, “ even that I will never do again, even in jest. I vowed

to love, honor and obey you, and even if I had not, who could help loving you? I loved you even when I feared you---what must I do now?"

CHAPTER II.

Wild thoughts within, bad men without,
All evil spirits round about,
Are banded in unblest device,
To spoil love's earthly paradise.

KEBLE.

Oh, beautiful is youth !
How often as it passes by,
With flowing limbs, and flashing eye,
With soul that not a care has crossed,
With cheek, that not a tint has lost ;
How often in my heart I cry.
How beautiful is youth !

WILLIAM HOWITT.

IT will now be necessary to give a short sketch
of the first married months of Lady de Cres-

spending them in Italy. In that fair land, under the influence of that climate, even the child of misfortune forgets for a time his misery, and Giulia found herself at the summit of earthly happiness, for besides the gifts of youth, health, and all that worldly circumstances can afford, she had now in her possession the one anxiously wished for prize, once her only hope, her only expectation for the future—that which she thought would make this world a Paradise!

And for a time Giulia might even be said to feel it such, with one like Claud whose affectionate, feeling heart naturally and easily inclined, whatever might have been wanting in his feelings before his marriage, towards her, to whom he was now linked by such tender ties.

She found herself the object of his exclusive attention, and to an unloved one—such as she had ever been, it appeared to her delighted heart, that now she had attained the

love of which she had ever dreamt—but never hoped to possess. Giulia forgot that she was not beautiful—that “none could be loved but the beautiful.”

Claud's affectionate heart rejoiced in the happiness he created. He discovered as those like him always find, that everything touched by the magic of a cheerful, willing spirit, will yield some portion of light and beauty; and in his young heart, he discovered qualities which were endearing her to him. The elastic spirits of the young man rose to their natural joyous height, Giulia's assuming that calm, happy serenity which better became her character; both blending well together, the one tempering the exuberance of the other—what happiness might have been theirs!

They were floating one day down the bay of Naples, where they had settled for the winter months. Though in November, the sky was blue above their heads, the air balmy as an English summer.

A boat glided past and both at once uttered an exclamation. Like a lightning flash a pair of well known eyes gleamed upon them. It was Nice. The friends had corresponded since their separation, and Giulia had heard that she was to be in Italy, but at Naples she had no idea of meeting her, the Marchesa's Palazzo being in a different part of the country.

However at Naples Nice was now residing. She had seen Claud and his lady; the man she had once loved---who had scorned her!--and seated triumphantly by his side she beheld her once despised tool, and they were together in their happiness, though she had doomed that it should cease---she would not endure to leave it undisturbed! The Italian girl had followed them to Naples with some such purpose, for the Marchesa's movements were easily directed by her advice; and now again by her consummate art, by which even Claud was subdued, she managed to wind herself with apparent

harmlessness around her victims till the period for their return to England. Fra Paolo had left Italy some time before, and under the roof of the Marchese, Nice said she no longer could remain with safety, to her honour.

To such a plea it was impossible for Claud to turn a deaf ear. Nice therefore returned with them to England. It was not till then, perhaps, that the effect of the new venom so gently and artfully instilled by the bosom serpent, into Giulia's heart, began invisibly to take effect.

The Baroness and her husband's destination on their arrival in England was London, and there it had been their intention to remain for a few months; but ere they had been many weeks in Grosvenor Square, Giulia expressed a wish to leave it for Shirley; and though her husband at first objected to a plan which seemed somewhat unreasonable and capricious, and naturally feeling some little reluctance to

quitting the Metropolis and its cheerful society for gloomy Shirley, he had soon goodnaturedly yielded, on seeing how strongly Giulia had set her heart on the plan.

Claud was also obliged to relinquish his opposition to the scheme, on noting the darkening brow, and the hurt expression of the tone of voice, with which Giulia hinted, that a husband of a few months, should require nothing more than the company of his wife.—And so the trio—for Nice still clung quietly but surely to their party, departed for that place, which had witnessed many a scene of dread and suffering.

Alas! that we had not more of sorrow and dread to relate!

And what had moved Giulia thus to act
Was it that it troubled her to be where others
but herself, must share her husband's notice
and attention? Could it be that she still felt
herself ill at ease on one point, in spite of the
almost incredible success of the design, which
was intended to have finally and effectually

cleared away from her path all further fear and distrust ; particularly after witnessing the unmixed happiness of Francesca and her husband ?

It is true that they were in London, and the two families in constant intercourse ; but might not the most mistrustful heart have rather gloried in the sight, of how happily she had succeeded in casting away all possibility of ever again indulging in the morbid feeling ?—ought not Giulia to have felt her heart swell with gratitude, on observing the sincere and heartfelt pleasure with which Claud Hamilton noted the felicity of his little favorite playmate—on hearing him extol the husband, and declare, that he was exactly the man he would have chosen for Francesca, and on listening to him expatiating on her beauty and grace, with feelings such as a kind brother might feel towards a pet young sister? And then the cheerful, careless frankness of their intercourse, in which nothing could possibly be discerned to create

a thought, that the regretful feeling ever crossed his mind—of *what might have been*. Giulia would have been fully satisfied---not a doubt or a fear would have disturbed her tranquillity, had she not possessed “a bosom friend”—but alas! it is well said that there are—

“ Demons who impair
The strength of bitter thoughts, and seek their prey
In melancholy bosoms such as were
Of moody texture from their earliest day
And love to dwell in darkness or dismay,
Deeming themselves predestined to a doom.”

One little sketch of a pleasing nature we must present to our readers, ere we proceed to that part of the story which we would fain delay approaching.

It was at an early drawing room that little Mrs. Vavasour was first introduced to the gay world. The two sisters were to be presented “on their marriage” that day. In spite of the strange impression, which Mrs. Rivers’s dread example of the dangers attending the gay in spirit, when launched upon the waves of the deceitful world, had made at the mo-

ment upon her mind, the old lady would have been somewhat shocked had seen how little it had apparently sobered her; for indeed her husband had rather lessened in her estimation the force of the good woman's opinions, by telling her that as a rule, it was a great mistake to imagine that gravity was alone a safeguard to virtue; on the contrary often might it be seen, that those who carry austerity on their lips indulge in laxity in conduct!

It was indeed impossible for her to believe, that there was anything necessary to restrain, in the innocent, joyous spirits that danced in her breast, as seated by her admiring and delighted husband she was whirled away to St. James's. How she laughed to see her little form decked in the grand and stately dress, and at her husband's vain entreaties that she would sit still in the carriage, instead of jumping up as every fresh equipage passed by, to catch a glimpse of its occupants, as well as to shew herself to the "poor people" who were not going to the drawing-room.

All this was done to the great danger of the disarrangement of her toilette, as well as to the eyes of her husband, into which, her waving plumes, never steady for a moment, continually intruded. Francesca was a little nervous on entering the saloons, and on finding herself approaching the august presence, but still her husband did not leave her, and she was so proud and happy to see him accosted with such respect by royalty--to hear the Regent say, "And that lady, Colonel Vavasour, is your wife, I conclude," never for a moment having the slightest idea, that probably it was her own pretty self rather than her gallant husband, which drew upon them such distinguished notice, from that illustrious personage, who possessed in so great a degree what is termed "an eye for beauty." And the young creature was soon encouraged by his fascinating manner, to talk to him with that innocent freedom, which as yet the stiff etiquette of court had not taught her to repress.

The Regent playfully congratulated Colonel Vavasour on the fair conquest, he had left the wars abroad, to achieve at home, "And so slyly too!" his Royal Highness added, "Really you soldiers are terrible fellows; are they not, Mrs. Vavasour?"

"Oh, I do not know, sir!" she said blushing, but with an arch expression in her beautiful eyes—"Colonel Vavasour won his victory in a very cowardly manner. He dressed himself in armour, and frightened me almost to death, and then he asked me to marry him, and so—" And Francesca turned her eyes beaming with love and devotion on her husband's face, and seeing there, something which indicated that she had gone too far, she paused suddenly, coloring deeply, and pressing closer to his side.

"So you obeyed his wishes," said the Regent laughing as he completed her sentence. "Well, fair lady, in my opinion you could not have done better, and I rejoice that such a prize has fallen to the gallant Colonel Vavasour's share."

And the Regent allowed them to pass on, many an echo reaching Francesca's ear, of the exclamation. "A perfect gem!" "a pocket Venus:" unintelligible words to her uninitiated senses.

Once she found herself on Claud's arm, to whose care Colonel Vavasour left her for a few moments, when the brother-in-law was much amused by the unsophisticated enjoyment of the little rustic, and the original remarks which she made on all around her.

Giulia was on his other arm, scandalized by the absence of dignity displayed in her sister's deportment. It certainly was a contrast to her own demeanour—she, a more practised courtier, who was sailing so majestically along, her plumes scarcely moving, her train sweeping after her so gracefully, whilst Francesca moved about with all the *abandon* of her ever restless, varying movements—attracting however many an admiring glance, which Giulia observed too well.

" Graceful you were! there needed not the tones
Of tabret, harp, or lute to modulate
Your soft harmonious footsteps, your light tread,
Fell like a natural music."

" And pray, Francesca," said Colonel Vavasour laughing, as they were talking over the drawing-room that same evening, " tell me who amongst all those you saw, did you think equal to your husband?"

" Oh, you are very conceited," the little wife replied, " you know very well that I saw none that was in any way to be compared to you; you only wish to hear me say so."

" Indeed, I know no such thing, Francesca," her husband laughingly answered, " but I am very glad to hear you say so."

" Do you imagine Giulia thinks as highly of Claud as I do of you?" Francesca enquired.

" She ought to value him highly, for he is a delightful fellow," said Colonel Vavasour, " I think your sister very fortunate in her husband."

" Oh, I am very glad you think so, Ernest; I am so fond of him—he was always so kind to me when I was a child—and he is so lively and agreeable. Yes, next to myself I think Giulia must be the most fortunate of women. It seemed so strange when I heard they were to be married—why, I know not, but Claud is so merry and amusing, and Giulia so grave and solemn; and that reminds me that I never told you what nurse said, when I told her of our intended marriage—I was so angry with her."

" What was it, my little wife?" the fond husband enquired.

" Do you know," she continued, " that instead of seeming very glad, as I expected, she looked quite cross, and when I made her tell me what ailed her, only think of the impertinence of the old woman! she said she had settled it all quite different, that Giulia was to have married you, and I Claud, and

this plan she considered would have been a much better arrangement."

"Perhaps she was right," said Colonel Vasour with mock gravity.

"Oh, Ernest, you do not think so!" she said clasping her hands in dismay—"Ah! you are smiling now---why did you frighten me? But I was very silly to believe you, for who would have suited you so well as your *own little wife?*"

CHAPTER III.

Content thyself, my dearest love ;
Thy rest at home shall be
In England's sweet and pleasant isle ;
For travel fits not thee.

My rose shall safely here abide,
With musicke passe the daye
Whilst I, among the pierceing pikes,
My foes seeke far awye."

ANCIENT POEMS.

IT was in the month of May that the Vavasours had been expected at Shirley Hall for the long planned meeting with Mrs. Gordon ; but in March Giulia received a letter from Colonel

Vavasour, saying that with their permission, he would bring down his wife immediately. At the same time he added that he had written to request Mrs. Gordon to join her niece as soon as possible, which he was sure on hearing the circumstances of the case, she would willingly consent to do ; Claud and Giulia were already aware what these circumstances must be.

Europe was in preparation to resist the unprincipled disturber of the world; England was already in movement, and Colonel Vavasour must take the command of his regiment ordered to the Netherlands.

Of this he had not yet summoned courage to inform Francesca ; he dreaded the effect which the intelligence might have upon her in her present situation, for in July she expected to become a mother.

Colonel Vavasour had taken for her a villa at Richmond, and had invited the young Hamilton's to stay with her ; therefore, though he was obliged often to leave Francesca, as he told

her, on business, he was able to go on with his preparations without exciting her suspicion.

But could the watchful eye of love not discern the change in her husband's spirits—his forced cheerfulness—his almost sorrowful intensity of tenderness towards herself, and not feel vague misgivings that some misfortune was hanging over her young head?

They went to Shirley where they were received with cordial warmth by their young host, and with kindness, almost affection from Giulia—for with all her faults she could sympathise with her sister under such trying circumstances. Mrs. Gordon in a few days after joined them, when Colonel Vavasour lost no time in making a petition to Lady de Crespigny, concerning a point on which he was deeply anxious. It would relieve him of a portion of the extreme anxiety he could not fail to experience, at leaving his poor little wife, to know, that during his absence she would be in her old

home, surrounded by those of her family most dear to her, and from whom he knew she would receive all the affection and tender care that he could desire for that loved being.

He had expected no denial of his request, nor did it meet with any ; on the contrary, with his frank warmth of manner, Claud assured the Colonel of the pleasure it would give him, indeed that as a matter of course he had never supposed for a moment, that Francesca would be left under any other protection.

And Giulia—there was a momentary sinking at her heart when her acquiescence was demanded—one painful struggle!—and then endeavouring with a strong effort to discard the troubled thoughts which rose in her mind, she gave as kind an assent as she could command, to her brother-in-law's petition. And he who was so far from suspecting that his darling Francesca was not prized, and dearly beloved by all, especially by her own sister, was perfectly satisfied.

Mrs. Gordon promised to stay with her till Colonel Vavasour's return, and there was now nothing but the act of separation to press upon the soldier's heart.

But it was necessary now that the truth should be broken to Francesca, for there was but a fortnight's grace ; the husband must then repair to London and shortly afterwards embark with his regiment. Mrs. Gordon regretted that this had not been done before ; the intelligence would thereby have been softened by the greater distance of the event. But she could enter into, and admire, the feelings of that manly heart, which, though gladly preparing, without a sigh or wish to the contrary, to face the perils of war, shrank with a woman's tenderness, from witnessing the grief of that young tender creature---but she strove to reassure him.

Mrs. Gordon fancied Francesca could not be so utterly unprepared. Of "the rumours of war," she could not have been quite igno-

rant. The mysterious conversations and looks of her husband, his change of spirits, scarcely could have escaped her usually quick observation; too the aunt had noted, that there was a deeper shadow on those clear, bright eyes—a more thoughtful expression, in the tenderness with which she gazed on her husband — a tenacious clinging to his side — a nervous disinclination to his leaving her for a moment. And then, Mrs. Gordon trusted to the spirit, which, under all her child-like disposition, she knew existed in the young heart of her niece, to bear her up through the coming trial.

Colonel Vavasour, at length nerved his heart to the dreaded communication. He drew her one evening into the gallery, and with agitated steps, paced with her in silence, its length. Suddenly he met Francesca's anxious gaze, lifted to his face.

"Ernest," she hurriedly said, with a faint smile; "do you remember this time last year?" And she paused before the armour.

He mournfully nodded acquiescence.

"Do you love me as well, Ernest?" she said,
"as then you did?"

"*As well, Francesca!*" was all the answer, as
he pressed her arm convulsively.

"Then why," she said, sadly, "do you not
trust me? I thought you would hide nought
from a wife you loved, but you have con-
cealed much from me of late. You have had
cares pressing on your heart, and have not
thought your wife worthy of sharing your
grieves---you have left her to find out herself,
that which she should have heard from your
lips alone. Ah! you may love her---but you
think her a poor, weak child. *She* wishes to be
loved as a brave man's wife!"

"Then you know, my beloved, that I must
leave you."

Francesca, for some time, had felt misgiv-
ings, which had been gradually assuming a
palpable form. She had schooled her heart
gradually to bear them; but the dread words, "*I*

must leave you, really heard --- really pronounced, seemed, at once, to crush all courage, and murmuring---

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" she threw her arms round her husband's neck, and wept bitterly.

"Francesca, you wish to be loved as a brave man's wife," he said, endeavouring to steady his voice almost to sternness, lest the tenderness to which his heart too well inclined, should but increase her emotion; "show yourself worthy of that name, by your firmness and courage."

"Yes---yes, Ernest, I will," she cried, lifting up her head, her eyes flashing through her tears with bright enthusiasm; "I will act as a brave man's wife! but you shall not leave me! Where is the wife's proper place, but by the side of her husband? what is her duty, but to follow him wherever he may go? Ernest, I have read---and you have told me yourself, of women who have followed their

husbands, even to the field of battle—why should I not be near you, to pray for your safety, to receive you in my arms on your return—if wounded, to nurse and tend you—and oh! merciful heaven! if you should fall—to die with you!"

Beautiful sophistry of a young and loving heart!

"My own Francesca!" the husband answered, pressing her in his arms; "listen to me dearest, a wife's proper place is where her husband wills her to abide—her duty to obey! Show, then, my darling, the real bravery of a soldier's wife, by your courageous resignation to that, which Providence has ordained; and which, many besides yourself, are doomed to suffer. Convince me of your love, by removing from my mind all care, all sorrow on your account, save the agony of our separation, and be content to remain here, where I know you will be safe and well cared for. Francesca, you must remem-

ber that you have now, not only yourself to consider. No! every tie of duty and of love, claim your utmost care of yourself. Let me see, then, my brave and loving girl, shew herself all that I know she really is. Her prayers will be heard by the God of Battle; though distance may divide us, I shall return, if it so pleases Him; and all I ask of you, is to love me when I do return, as tenderly as now I know you do---only promise me this, my treasure!"

She promised all with silent tears, with a pale, but resolute countenance. There were no more outbreaks of affliction; sternly she nerved her young heart to repress her feelings. She brought herself even to listen calmly to her husband's wishes and arrangements, during his absence. She made him enter into every minutiae concerning them, in order that she might have, at least, the comfort of fulfilling all his commands; and then, with the elastic spirit of youth, she

seemed to skip over the dread interval, and spoke of the events relating to his return as if they were about immediately to occur.

"Where should she meet him?" she enquired.

"At Shirley," he said, "unless he wrote to the contrary — he would wish to find her, on his return, where he had left her." "You will not wish to run away to seek gaiety," Colonel Vavasour added, smiling, "whilst your husband is absent?"

"Ernest, I think even Mrs. Rivers will be satisfied. I shall, indeed, be grave enough to please her. I do not imagine, that I shall have the slightest inclination to laugh till your return."

"Francesca, do not speak thus," her husband said, with grave earnestness; "if you wish to please *me* in every respect, I pray you, dearest, be as cheerful as you can. I shall love to think of you with a smile on your lips, not with the tear dimming your

bright eyes; besides, in gratitude to those who are so kind to you, you must endeavour to be cheerful—and, Francesca, the most important of every consideration, is, that by your patient, ready submission, you will best evince your faith and confidence in that merciful God, in whose hands you will have trusted your husband."

CHAPTER IV.

" . . . Already in your eyes
I see a pale suffusion rise;
And soon, through every vein,
Soon will her secret venom spread,
And all your heart, and all your head,
Imbibe the potent stain.

AKENSIDE.

IT will be needless to enter into any detail of the period which intervened between the last conversation, and the miserable moment of separation between Francesca and her

husband. It is not difficult to imagine with what feelings those two tenderly attached beings, with their respective prospects before them, felt that dreaded time approaching. Sad in their intensity, were the looks of affection which they cast upon each other. And yet, notwithstanding the strong tie which bound him to his home, the soldier's heart chafed and panted, like that of the war-horse, to find himself once more in the sphere, which, for so long, had been his element—the field of glory and of action! *He* had that excitement to seek—but his poor, young wife would remain inactive behind—having lost her all of joy—her husband! None, however, could fail to admire the gentle manner in which Francesca conducted herself during the time of trial—and all those around her, seemed to vie with each other in shewing kindness to the poor, little wife.

Her aunt was even more than ever affectionate. Claud exerted himself to the very

utmost, to enliven and keep up her spirits, and Colonel Vavasour was delighted, when he perceived that he had succeeded in making her laugh and talk for a short time, like her own merry self.

But it was, also, a trying time to Giulia. At first, indeed, when she saw her sister thus the object of universal interest and attention, she made an effort to reason herself into believing and appreciating the true cause of all this solicitude, and to endeavour to enter into the spirit which influenced others in their conduct towards the sorrowing, young wife. She did, indeed, struggle to repress the dreaded feeling of envy, which she felt was casting its dark shadow over her heart. But weak must have been the attempt at self-government, which she had so feebly attempted, when a word—a look—a tone, from her bosom friend — any trifling speech or incident which occurred, that might, in any indirect manner, be taken hold of as

affording offending matter for a jealous heart, had the power of recalling to the recollection of those who noticed the Baroness's present demeanour, the Giulia of former days.

The party had taken advantage of a fine spring morning to make a little excursion some miles distant, and were rowing for a short time on a river.

Francesca's spirits were exhilarated by the fresh, cheerful air, as well as by the childlike pleasure which she took in an amusement almost new to her—that of being upon the water. Seated close to her husband's side she chattered with almost her usual gaiety.

Her conversation was chiefly addressed to Claud, who sat opposite to them, with Giulia next to him. Nice was also in the boat.

"Do you remember, Claud," she was constantly saying; and then she would recal little incidents of her childhood in which he had acted a conspicuous part.

"Really I shall be quite jealous," at length Colonel Vavasour laughingly interposed, "at you two having been on such intimate terms, before I was even heard or thought of by you, Francesca."

"Oh indeed," she replied, smiling archly, "I can assure you, that Colonel Vavasour was heard of, and thought of too. You were always held up to me as the great fierce warrior, who was to come back and keep me in order. I had such an impression of you in my mind. Only imagine how strange it is, that I should now be *your* little wife; for *then* you must know," she added, laughing, "I was called another's — and by that gentleman there, who proved so inconstant, that I was forced to put up with my terrible guardian."

Colonel Vavasour smiled with tender pleasure on Francesca, as she thus prattled on, but he was somewhat *distract* and grave that morning.

"You are making us all melancholy, Sig-

nora Vavasour," said the soft voice of Nice, scarcely before heard, "by talking of the days that are gone. I heard a pensive sigh breathed by Mr. Hamilton."

Giulia darted a quick glance at her husband, who laughing said, that he was not aware that he had performed an act so sentimental.

" Sad—what should make us sad in talking of past days, when they were happy ones?" asked Francesca. " Has it that effect upon you or Claud, Giulia! it *ought* not, at least, when the present is so far happier still."

" What would ever make *you* sad, Francesca?" said Giulia colouring and evading the answer, that must be given by herself or Claud. " I must say I envy your spirits which never seem to flag under any circumstances."

" Ah!" said Francesca, her countenance losing its bright expression, and her eyes filling with tears. " I know what you mean—you think you would not be so gay if Claud were going so soon to leave you," and she

sadly laid her head upon her husband's shoulder, who looked with an expression of grave surprise at Lady de Crespigny, for in so unnecessary a manner rousing the poor young creature from the momentary forgetfulness of her sorrows.

With some confusion Giulia stammered forth something like an apology to Francesca, in order to exculpate herself from having had any such meaning, and Francesca to dispel any uncomfortable feeling which might have arisen amongst the party, tried to resume her cheerfulness.

But the spirit of mischief was abroad that day.

Francesca was looking so lovely—her countenance so sweet—her husband's eyes dwelt on her face with all the idolatry of one, from whom it was soon to be hidden, for many a long day, and Giulia fancied the attentions of Claud to herself, cold and constrained, in comparison, and that his eyes were continually

wandering to his fair *vis-a-vis*, who was again smiling and talking with him ; and when he did catch a glimpse of her gloomy countenance, must he not have been struck by the contrast ?

Nice saw all this and managed in the same quiet way, to drop in with speeches, seemingly harmless as the last, but which proved in their effect like a drop of burning oil upon a wound, to the irritable feelings of Giulia.

Even Francesca at last began to feel their drift, and Colonel Vavasour to observe that all was not right.

At length it came to a crisis. Something in the conversation enabled Nice to insinuate the following words with marked emphasis—

“ Ah ! you are very kind, Signora Vavasour ; you, I think, love everybody ! ”

“ Do I ? ” cried Francesca, her eyes suddenly flashing, “ you are mistaken there, Nice, for I am sure I do not *love you*.”

Giulia’s brow became black as night at this

inimical speech aimed at her friend, and which she considered as an insult to herself. Even Colonel Vavasour looked grave and displeased. But Nice, with the most perfect composure, smiled indulgently, nor was it till some time after, that she turned her eyes with a very significant and sinister expression on the offender.

Claud had bent over the boat to hide a smile created by the speech of Francesca, and to break the awful silence, he cried jestingly as he flung some water amongst the ladies—

“ You are becoming personal in your remarks; what a difficult task I shall have to keep you all in order !”

But a gloom was now thrown over the whole party, during the rest of the expedition, for Francesca saw that her husband was somewhat displeased, and although she tried by some little graceful attempts to make up to Nice for

her too hastily uttered words, she could not recover her spirits.

On their return home Colonel Vavasour gently blamed her for the rudeness of her speech to Nice. He began to suspect, that matters were not quite as he could have wished between every member of the party he was about to leave together, and he now, for the first time, felt desirous of enquiring more into the character of the Italian girl.

Francesca confessed to him that though she was sorry for what she had inadvertently said still that it was not very far from the truth ; for indeed she had never been able to feel for her much affection, and lately she was sorry to say, she liked her less than ever. She said she was also jealous of her for poor Claud's sake ; and she added,

"*You, Ernest, would not, I am sure, like me to have a friend always in your way, as she is in his-- finding out every thing—listening to every thing he says. I feel convinced*

he does not like it, although he is too good-natured, and anxious to gratify Giulia, to express how odious he considers it. Why, even Aunt Gordon is always so scrupulous of interfering with us, and she so differently situated ! But Nice never leaves Giulia if she can help it, and never does her any good, I fancy ; for though my sister may be attached to her, she is always much more cheerful when not in her presence."

" I never heard my little Francesca so bitter against any one before," remarked Colonel Vavasour.

" Not bitter, Ernest ! but I may have more cause perhaps than you think, for being a little so," continued Francesca, " for I have lately discovered, that it is to her I may attribute Giulia's coldness towards her poor little sister."

Colonel Vavasour looked somewhat disturbed, but he only said,

" Well, dearest, do you be careful to abstain

from acting in any way that may be likely to hurt or offend your sister, so that at any rate you may have nothing for which to reproach yourself. I feel certain that under the protection of your aunt, you will be always safe and in comfort, and I know you are too sensible and amiable, to excite any other feelings save those of kindness; and who can refrain from loving you?"

"Hamilton," Colonel Vavasour continued as Claud entered at the moment, "this little lady has been promising to behave very well, and I am sure you will all be very kind to her!"

"Kind to her!" said Claud with warmth, "I hope so indeed."

"Oh I am secure of Claud's affection," said Francesca gratefully, "he always was kind to me," and she placed her little hand confidently in his.

Colonel Vavasour turned his eyes upon them for a moment with something of a

thoughtful expression, and then said gravely,

"Yes, Francesca, I can leave you, I know, with comfort and confidence to his care. I shall expect," he continued with a smile, "to hear a very good account of you from him on my return."

"I hope so indeed," Francesca exclaimed, turning towards her husband with earnest tenderness, "do you think there is any chance of his being able to say ought against me? Then indeed should I fear your return, more than ever did Blue Beard's wife, for though you might not kill me with your sword, a reproachful glance from those eyes of yours, would as effectually strike me dead."

CHAPTER V.

" My gentle little one that hang'st upon me,
With such fond hold, in good sooth we must part,
Here bid Heaven bless me, and no farther go.
+ * + It must be so
Sweet one farewell!"

JOANNA BAILEY.

THE dreaded day at length arrived.

Colonel Vavasour was to depart at early dawn. It was his intention to take no final leave, and Francesca, wearied by a wakeful, wretched night, had sunk into a deep sleep

when he left her side. Once more he stole into the chamber to take one long anxious look, and then joined Claud, who awaited him in the gallery.

Colonel Vavasour soon rose from his untasted breakfast, and putting his arm within that of Claud's, walked to and fro with him, talking in a low and earnest voice about his poor young wife.

Between the two brothers-in-law the utmost regard and esteem had arisen. Their noble natures were formed for the friendship they felt towards each other, and which, at this moment, evinced itself by the confidence of the one, and the sympathy of the other. Suddenly, whilst thus engaged, they heard a gentle sound behind them like the patting of a child's footsteps. They looked round and saw a little white figure standing near them. It was Francesca.

She was wrapped in her dressing gown—her little bare feet slipped hastily into slippers.

A look of troubled grief, and tears, were on her pale face.

She threw herself into her husband's arms—she did not speak, but sobbed hysterically. Colonel Vavasour cast a look of dismayed anguish on Claud.

"I will go and see if all is ready," the latter murmured, his kind nature tortured by the sight of all this sorrow—and the husband and wife were left alone.

"Francesca, this is not well of you," faltered Colonel Vavasour, "it is not well towards yourself or me; these partings are enough to break the stoutest heart, and what do they avail?"

"It may grieve us now, Ernest, but afterwards—oh, if you knew what anguish it would have been to me to have lost this last embrace, your last—last words—to have awakened and found you gone! if you could but imagine my feelings, you would not chide me."

It is strange with what different feelings men and women look upon trials of a similar nature. What cowards are the strong, and even the firmest men—how they shrink from encountering any scene which may wound their sensibilities, whilst to women there even seem, to be a luxury in the grief such agony occasions—a comfort in the out-pourings of the heart! This tendency in the weaker sex, may be traced under far more heart-rending circumstances, than mere temporary separations. A woman often clings until the last moment to the inanimate form of a beloved one about to be hidden for ever in this world from her gaze—whilst the iron-hearted man most generally turns with dread and horror from the anguish of that “long last look,” the more intense often, in proportion to the adoration once felt towards the departed.

“And now, Francesca, I *must* go,” exclaimed the half-distracted husband, “cling to me no more, dearest—Francesca, they are coming—

"Friends! what are friends to Ernest? I care for none but him now."

"What! not for poor Claud?"

"Poor Claud indeed! when he is so cruel as to laugh at my misery."

In spite of this bitter charge, Claud, thinking it better to excite this mood of petulance than that of the pathetic, continued in the same vein of railery, and at last succeeded in touching one of those chords, which in the midst of sorrow, is often most easily affected; and at length the poor little thing smiled, and even laughed hysterically through her tears, though she called him at the same time cruel, for thus trifling with her feelings, and

"Strange though it seem—yet with extremest grief,
Is linked a mirth—it does not bring relief—
That playfulness of sorrow ne'er beguiles,
And smiles in bitterness—but still it smiles."

Mrs. Rivers at this moment entered; she had been in attendance to superintend the de-

parture of Colonel Vavasour, and had received his last instructions to see that Francesca should be immediately attended to, which orders she was on her way to fulfil, though not aware that she had risen. The old woman therefore looked with great surprise on the scene before her, and some grave censure.

"Mrs. Vavasour, you had better return to your bed," she said in a tone of severity, and as Francesca was easily awed by any such tone from those whom she respected, she arose in obedience.

Mrs. Rivers glanced with an air of surprised reprobation on the thin dress and naked feet then displayed to her sight, shining like snow on the dark oaken floor, but she made some allowance for this breach of strict propriety as arising from the thoughtlessness of extreme distress, and she led her to her chamber, on the way to which, they met Mrs. Gordon, who was coming to seek her, having been informed by Nice, whom she found skulking

about the corridor, that Francesca was in the gallery.

"Is she alone?" Mrs Gordon had anxiously enquired.

"Oh no! she has found a very effectual comforter in Mr. Hamilton, who is succeeding admirably in that office, or I should have offered my services," and so saying she glided to the apartment of Giulia, to greet her waking senses with the same tale. Mrs. Gordon noticed the somewhat cynical tone in which these words were uttered, but to herself the manners of Nice had become of late anything but agreeable, therefore on this particular occasion she took no heed of their impertinence. She knew not that the dark spirit, long tutored in the school of guile and art, was now on the wings of hatred and revenge, ready to issue forth in full strength and power—

"The female dog-star of her little sky,
Where all beneath her influence droop and die."

Nice had not expected that fate would have thus propitiously come to her aid ; her trust had been in her own art and talents for the furtherance of her scheme of vengeance, which was intended to blast the peace and happiness of her victim.

Drop by drop, slowly and gradually did she purpose to instil the poison, by which the domestic bliss of Claud Hamilton was to be destroyed, by working on the weakness of the unhappy creature who had ever been as a tool in her hand—the miserable Giulia!

The vindictive Italian had vowed to herself that she would make the generous spirit of the noble hearted Claud writhe under the tyranny of suspicion and jealousy—his married lot become a bed of thorns ; that he should be goaded to loathe the gilded pill he had forced himself to swallow, when he had turned in scorn and hatred from beauty and passion like hers. Perhaps he would be driven from his boasted height of virtue and probity ; or

if he did not fall—his unspotted name, at least be blackened and clouded ; and he should find to his sorrow, but too late, what it was to cast back in scorn, the passion of an Italian woman's heart—and that when next it would burst forth, the character of that passion would have altered into hate—aye bitter hatred !

But a smooth and easy field now was opened before her, as if by some secret power of mischief, in league with her designs.

Truly one strong effort seemed now sufficient to do the work at once.

CHAPTER VI

“ Then many a demon will she raise
To vex your sleep, to haunt your ways ;
While gleams of lost delight
Raise the dark tempest of the brain,
As lightning shines across the main
Through whirlwinds and through night.

No more can faith or candour move ;
But each ingenuous deed of love,
Which reason would applaud,
Now, smiling o'er her dark distress,
Fancy malignant strives to dress
Like injury and fraud.”

AKENSIDE.

THERE was much anxiety within the walls of Shirley Hall ere the day of Colonel Vavasour's departure closed, and before the morn-

ing dawnd sounds, which for long years had not been heard beneath its roof, were listened to by many an anxious heart—an infant's feeble wail !

The grief and agitation of her husband's departure, had been too much for Francesca, and a premature confinement was the consequence ; before Colonel Vavasour embarked from England, he heard that he was the father of a son, and that both the mother and child were doing well.

Francesca's baby ! how strange this sounded to every ear.

Claud laughed heartily when he first heard these words pronounced. He could hardly realize their actual truth. The child herself it seemed of yesterday, to be a mother ! Giulia laughed not—After the first natural relief at her sister's safety had abated, those words seemed but to plant fresh thorns in her heart—or rather to renew the mortification, which Francesca's situation had not failed to cause

her to endure. But every feeling of pride must urge her to struggle to conceal this from all eyes—save one to whose power she seemed to have passively surrendered her every thought, who it might almost be imagined, had acquired some supernatural means of discovering them. As to Francesca, when sufficiently recovered to be able to notice her baby—for during many days after its birth she was seriously ill—it was a curious sight to see the little creature in her novel position, and to witness the sentiments it had created.

Such very young mothers seldom feel maternal affection, when first the impulse is called forth in its most intense force. The feeling is one which increases imperceptibly—and when Francesca was first introduced to her son, she was more puzzled and surprised than anything else.

She had never before seen a new born child, and certainly, was somewhat disappointed with the appearance of the little specimen brought

triumphantly by the nurse for her inspection—and scorned the idea of this tiny, red-faced, crying, little being, having been sent, as she was told, to supply the place of her noble Ernest.

But the event had happened at a most fortunate period, for the little arrival did tend to divert her mind from dwelling so much on her husband's absence — she soon began to be interested and fond of the baby—more, however, as a child would be with a new doll or plaything.

During the first two or three weeks after Francesca's confinement, Claud went to London for a few days to report to his family the progress of the young invalid. He was anxious to persuade his mother to accompany him back to Shirley. But it was the height of the London season; and Mrs. Hamilton, though relieved for the present, from her office of chaperone, was still up to her ears in engagements —indeed, the gay mother was much oftener to

be seen at the various balls and entertainments which were daily occurring, than her daughter, Lady Beverley, as the latter entered less into the gaiety of London, to gratify her own inclination, than to please her husband—who, in spite of the traces of the small-pox, was proud of his Annie.

Mrs. Hamilton, besides having many engagements before her, was glad of an excuse to decline a visit to Shirley Hall—for she truly had a horror of its extreme gloom, although she never hinted the reason to her son—and also, perhaps, she felt a secret dread of witnessing, too closely, the state of domestic matters between Claud and Giulia. No doubt, the worldly, though affectionate mother, shrank from the knowledge of any lack of connubial happiness in a marriage which she had forced upon her too yielding son. Mrs. Hamilton, therefore, rather rejoiced that Francesca's unexpected confinement relieved her from the necessity of offering her services, which,

otherwise, she might have felt it incumbent upon her to have done.

She would now, however, be often in the neighbourhood, for Dr. Mansell having died, Gertrude and her husband, were on the point of taking possession of his late residence, about five miles from Shirley Hall.

Claud, therefore, returned alone. He found Francesca still on the sofa in her bed-room, but Mrs. Gordon promised, that he should visit his little sister in the evening with the rest of the party.

He had, besides his wish to see her, news to relate concerning military affairs abroad.

The arrangements with regard to the accommodation of the family had been altered since Francesca's abode amongst them. Giulia had chosen for herself and husband, the apartments in the corridor, consisting of those her parents inhabited. The Italian room, as it was generally called amongst the household, had been, till now, held sacred, and

unappropriated to any use—indeed, from the time when Giulia had first begun to shun the apartment, it had been generally kept locked up by Mrs. Rivers; and this circumstance imparted to the chamber a degree of mystery, infusing into the servants' minds a superstitious awe, and causing them carefully to avoid entering the corridor after dusk.

The domestics were, therefore, much surprised at their young lady's having now chosen it as her private sitting-room, and Mrs. Rivers evidently objected to the arrangement; but as Giulia was firm in her determination, she could not oppose it.

Nice still occupied her old apartment in the opposite corridor—which, with this exception, was given up entirely to the use of Mrs. Vavasour and Mrs. Gordon—the old schoolroom being arranged for their morning occupation—so that, excepting at meals or in the

evening, the party might consider themselves independent of each other.

Claud laughingly gave these arrangements the name of "the Rival Corridors," (ominous appellation !) as he repaired to visit "the Queen of the East," as he also called its little occupant, accompanied by his "Queen of the West," and her lady in waiting ; the presence, of Nice he could not but, however, think might have been, on this occasion, dispensed with, and so did Francesca.

In her present delicate state of nerves and health, it had all along been unpleasing to her, that her sister never could visit her apartment, even for a few minutes, without the Italian girl being by her side, to stand and fix her eyes upon her—those dreadful, glittering eyes ! which of late—particularly since the rash speech she had made upon the water, Francesca had remarked to have assumed an undisguised expression of dislike—something she

could hardly define, but which raised a troubled, and disagreeable feeling in her breast.

So much did it affect her, that she would cover up her baby's face, lest the glance should, perchance, turn upon it also—

"For she was sure," she said, half jestingly, half sorrowfully, to her aunt, who chid her for the thought, "that there was some evil influence in her eye, which would exert some impious power over the little creature, like that of the wicked fairy in the tale."

And there she was again this very evening, this Italian girl; though Francesca heeded her not so much—for she had so many things to say, and to hear from Claud.

He revived her spirits which had been before so depressed, by his cheerfulness and gaiety. She was so much amused by seeing him attempt to nurse the baby, and at all the droll speeches he made on the occasion, that she paid no attention to anything else; and was very sorry, when, after a very short visit, Giulia put an end to it

on the plea of her fear of exciting her too much, and thence retarding her recovery. In this opinion Mrs. Gordon fully agreed. Indeed, the aunt did not encourage very frequent or lengthened visits from Claud--and Francesca's weak state was the reason she gave; but probably, she had others, in which Giulia was more concerned; for, with her knowledge of the fatal tendency in her elder niece's character, she was aware that it would require the most judicious management to prevent its again breaking out, under circumstances, which must now render it so much more dangerous and distressing.

If Mrs. Gordon had been consulted before hand, she would have advised other arrangements than those that had been made concerning Francesca, during her husband's absence--but she had found it all settled--apparently with Giulia's own cheerful concurrence--and she was somewhat inclined to the doctrine, which sees, as ordained by Almighty wisdom, every

event and circumstance in man's existence ; and, she felt that although our blind eyes may not be able to discern the end appointed in the various dispensations of Providence, still we must not strive against that, which seems to be predestined by God.

And might not perhaps the present circumstances tend in the end to the final cure of morbid sentiments so destructive to the happiness of Giulia, whilst a less desperate remedy might but have kept up the delusion ?

Francesca was soon well enough to exchange her bed-room for the sitting-room, and then to leave the house for an airing.

One morning Giulia proposed to her husband that she should drive him over in the afternoon in a little carriage to visit the Seymours. The ponies he had himself trained for her use, and had tutored her into being a very expert whip.

He happened to see Francesca soon after the arrangement had been made. She was

pining, she said, to enjoy a little of the fresh air of that beautiful day.

It was about the end of May. Francesca was leaning out of the window, longing, she said, for the liberty of rambling about as usual, but as yet she was scarcely allowed to walk out of a snail's pace many minutes together. And in the close carriage, she declared she felt more like a prisoner than even in the house, and she exclaimed, "how delightful!" when Claud informed her that Giulia was going to drive out in her pony carriage.

"Would you really like to go?" Claud asked.

"Oh! yes, I should really enjoy it of all things," she said, with her usual open frankness. "it must be so delightful to fly so fast as I saw you and Giulia drive, the other day with those beautiful ponies—and I want very much to see Gertrude's child that I may judge of what my little monkey will be at its age."

"Well, be ready at one o'clock, and you shall go," said Claud.

Francesca gratefully thanked him, and seemed charmed with the thoughts of the expedition.

Claud Hamilton soon after went to inform Giulia what he had promised her sister.

"But I asked you to go with me," she said colouring slightly.

"Yes, I know that, and I should have been very happy to have accompanied you; but 'when a lady's in the case, all other things, of course, give place,' and I could not have been so ungallant as not to have offered my seat, when she expressed such pleasure at the idea, and when I knew she would so thoroughly appreciate it, poor little thing!"

"But I think," said Giulia, "when two ladies are in the case, and one of them is your wife, it would be more natural to consult her feelings first; and you know, Claud," she continued, and her voice trembled with the too

susceptible tenderness, which alas! affords to a mind like hers pain rather than pleasure, " You know that I should not enjoy the drive, except for the pleasure of your society."

" Thank you, dear Giulia; I am sorry then that I have been the means of disappointing you—but you will surely enjoy giving your poor sister pleasure. I really have letters to write, and I will take this opportunity of paying Mrs. Gordon the attention of taking a walk with her. You know I rode over to see the Seymours only yesterday, and therefore to return you the compliment, excepting for the pleasure of your society, dear Giulia, I would rather stay at home."

Giulia looked for a moment as if willing to resign herself to that, which was urged with so kind a look and manner that it was almost impossible to resist its influence. A soft voice however exclaimed,

" La Signora Vavasour ought to be much flattered at the great sacrifices made for her

gratification. Mr. Hamilton is very obliging to relinquish so easily a pleasure, upon which he seems to set so great a store."

These words made Claud look round hastily, for Nice had glided into the room without his having observed her. His countenance at first expressed surprise at a speech which, if understood, as the words implied, must have been considered a somewhat unnecessary interference; but spoken as they were in a tone of significance, and accompanied by a peculiar expression, could scarcely be mistaken as open irony, which even his good nature did not prevent his feeling as most impertinent.

The cloud again spread over the countenance of Giulia, and, for the first time, the eyes of her husband began clearly to see through the mist which, with the natural kindness of his heart, had hitherto blinded his perception, or made him unwilling to suspect the secret and pernicious influence of the

Italian girl, so often darkening the spirit of his unhappy wife, and which now awakened misgivings in his mind as to their future happiness and comfort.

Then did the young man's mind revert to many parts of the conduct of Nice, which had at one time filled him with such disgust; her forward behaviour towards himself in London which her altered demeanour, for the last few months, had almost obliterated from his remembrance, and he began to think seriously, that not only to satisfy the natural antipathy which men generally entertain towards their wife's *bosom friend*, but also to ensure the future peace of himself and Giulia, he must endeavour to rid the house of the incubus which had fastened herself so pertinaciously on the young Baroness.

Claud, however, dropped the subject for the present, nor did he take the slightest notice of the speech, after the first cold look of surprise he fixed upon the Italian girl's face.

When, however, one o'clock arrived, Francesca tripped into the library where he was sitting alone reading, equipped for the expedition, she asked if Giulia was ready, with a countenance which implied that she was all pleased anticipation. Claud told her he would go and inquire, and immediately repaired to the private sitting room of his wife.

There he found her seated with Nice. There were no signs of any preparation for the drive ; and when he informed her that the carriage was waiting her orders, Giulia replied with a half ashamed, half moody expression, that she had given up her intention of going out, and that he might countermand her orders.

Claud was now really provoked ; the more so, as he could not but fancy that Giulia had been excited to this mode of proceeding, by the influence of her, who, he began to see, in so new a point of view.

" Giulia, this is, indeed, nonsense," he exclaimed, rather angrily ; but subduing his ris-

ing emotion, said more calmly, “your sister is already dressed and waiting for you — surely, you will not disappoint her.”

“ *I cannot disappoint her, as I never promised anything.*”

“ But Giulia, you know that I did—never for a moment, dreaming that her own sister would not feel the same desire to give the poor, little creature pleasure—she, who has just now, such claims on our consideration. However, if you have decided against it, there is no other alternative, but that I must drive her myself.”

Giulia started and changed color.

“ Come, Giulia, will you go or not? for if not, we need not keep Francesca waiting.”

Giulia looked uneasy—hesitated, and turned her eyes timidly towards Nice, as if wishing to read in her countenance some expression, which would decide her actions; but the Italian’s face was hidden from her sight, and was pertinaciously bent over a book.

Claud perceived all this; and now, thoroughly provoked, exclaimed—

" Well, Giulia, as it seems so difficult to you to make up your mind without assistance, on a matter which seems to me so easily decided, I had better relieve you from all further trouble, by going at once and driving Francesca."

So saying, Claud quitted the room, leaving Giulia in a state of startled dismay, and then Nice lifted up her face and looked upon Giulia, with the expression with which a sorceress might be imagined to gaze upon a victim who was writhing under the influence of some charm, concocted by her hideous art.

CHAPTER VII.

The sunny temper, bright where all is strife—
The simple heart, that mocks at worldly wiles ;
Light wit, that plays along the calm of life,
And stirs its languid surface into smiles.

The happy, grateful spirit that improves
And brightens every gift by fortune given ;
That wander where it will, with those it loves,
Makes every place a home, and home a heaven.

MOORE.

FRANCESCA did not certainly manifest much disappointment, when Claud informed her that her sister had changed her mind, and did not intend to drive, and that in consequence she must

put up with him as a companion. She sprang lightly into the little carriage by his side, and the ponies pranced gaily out of the courtway. The little mother had been looking very delicate since her confinement, her eyes had not yet recovered their wonted brightness—her cheek its healthful hue, her voice its buoyant tone; but now as they flew briskly along on one of those fine, cheerful, sunny days, when all nature seems to rejoice, and to the innocent heart, when existence is felt as a blessing, a spring of grateful gladness seemed to infuse itself through her whole frame, speaking in her joyous tone or beaming eyes as she lifted them up in silent enjoyment—

“ Like a reviving flower when storms
Are hushed on high.”

She was soon chatting gaily to her companion, but as usual her conversation turned, like the needle to the compass -- to her husband !

Francesca had received a letter from him

that very morning, and ever and anon she would take it from her bosom to read some little passage over to herself or her companion—urging Claud to tell her his suppositions concerning the issue of military affairs, and the possibility of there being, after all, no fighting, and that her husband might be able to return almost immediately to her. All this Claud endeavoured to enter into with interested attention, though in his manner there was less of natural cheerfulness than usual. Francesca probably remarked this for she suddenly said with a sweet smile:—

“ I am very selfish, talking of nothing but my own interests---but I dare say you, who were so long separated from Giulia and all your family, can imagine how difficult it is to forget the absent, even for two minutes together. I can scarcely help talking about what I am so constantly thinking of, when I have some one near me who will listen as kindly as you do, dear Claud. It is different with some

people. Now Giulia—even of you I remember she seldom or ever spoke--she used to prefer sitting by herself to think about you. And they say," she continued with somewhat of sadness, " that people feel much more who talk less—but I am sure," Francesca exclaimed with a smile, " I feel quite enough---so much that it would kill me if I could not unburthen myself a little by words. But," she added, " do let me try to drive a little ; I have been watching you, and I am sure I can guide those gentle beauties," and Claud had to put the reins into her little hands and direct them in their management, till a more spirited movement of the little animals forced her to relinquish *the ribbons* in feigned affright.

" I shall wait I think till Ernest comes home, for he has promised me a carriage and ponies---so you see, Mr. Claud, I have as good a husband as Giulia, although I must own that she has a most good-tempered *sposo*."

"Perhaps he may be rather *too* good-tempered," Claud answered with a serious smile.

"Not in Giulia's case," Francesca answered, "she is so wise and prudent, that she does not require any one to keep her in order as I do. I cannot imagine *you* looking severe and angry."

"I cannot say I ever remember seeing Vavasour look either severe or angry," said Claud laughing.

"But *I have*," continued Francesca, "sometimes for a moment--and I have a dread and fear of ever doing that which might draw upon me such a look; but even in his anger I loved to gaze upon his countenance—it was like watching the glories of a thunder storm. Is it not strange, Claud," she continued after a pause, "that Ernest could have loved *me*?"

"Strange!" repeated Claud, "no, Francesca, I cannot think it strange," and he turned his eyes abruptly away from the sweet eyes gazing up seriously into his face.

"But I mean," she persisted, "that it was

strange that he should have preferred me sufficiently to make me his wife! When I was in London I saw so many beautiful, stately women, who I sighed to think were so superior in appearance to myself. However here I am still talking of myself and husband--and you, poor Claud, are looking quite weary of me, and wishing no doubt that you had Giulia by your side, instead of such a little chatterer."

"And of course you wish that Vavasour was in my place," he said smilingly.

Francesca gave a merry laughing answer, as they were now entering the village in which the Seymours resided.

On driving up to the door of the snug little Vicarage, opposite to which was the pretty steepled Church embosomed in trees, Mr. Seymour met them at the door, and ushered them into an elegant little apartment furnished with all the taste and refinement of a London lady's boudoir.

Here they were received by its mistress, as

pretty as ever, but very little in character with the idea Francesca had pictured to herself as properly belonging to a clergyman's wife. Gertrude as well as her husband were both delighted to see their young guest, who had appeared so unexpectedly, instead of their grave sister-in-law and patroness. She was so interested in all she saw, so delighted with the pretty, comfortable rooms, which looked so light and cheerful after those of gloomy Shirley, and in raptures with the baby, a lovely little fair girl of a year old, dressed superbly.

Mr. Seymour shewed Francesca the Church, the school, everything belonging to the establishment, whilst Claud remained chatting with his sister, and she returned charmed by all that she had seen.

" How happy you must be !" Francesca exclaimed to Gertrude, who she found reclining on her sofa, " it makes me almost wish that Ernest was a clergyman, and then he never would leave me. How you must enjoy every

duty, your station imposes on you—teaching in the school, and visiting the poor ! How fond they all seem of your husband, Gertrude!"

" Yes," replied the clergyman's wife, " he is certainly a contrast to old Doctor Manvers, who was too fat and indolent to attend to the parish, and as he was not married, they do not miss the services of a parson's wife; which I regret to say," she added with a shrug of her pretty shoulders and a half smile, " I am not able to bestow upon them."

" Oh, what a pity," cried Francesca, " but, why are you not able Gertrude?"

" Oh ! you must ask my husband," she said with a smile at Mr. Seymour ; " ask him if he does not think he manages everything much better himself, and would not greatly prefer my remaining at home, to guide my house—the true duty of a wife, as St. Timothy declares—and take care of my child, rather than spend my mornings, in a hot, close, school, where I only,

do harm, by making the children look off their books to stare at me, and with the risk of bringing home all sorts of infection to my little daughter. Now would you not rather, Mr. Seymour, that I should stay at home?"

Mr. Seymour shook his head; but with an indulgent smile, he looked upon the pretty indolent wife he had chosen for his help-mate.

And such is the weakness of the best of natures when under that spell, with which even the wisest are infatuated. Mr. Seymour had no desire to see her otherwise than she was; indeed would have felt little pleasure to have beheld her metamorphosed suddenly into a good, homely, useful, clergyman's wife.

In these our days of improvement in every branch of education, moral and physical, it strikes us that it would be a blessing to the rising generation of clergymen, if an establishment were formed, for the purpose of training young women to fulfil the duties of wives to the reverend community, from

which they might be warranted sound in mind and body, and qualified to take upon themselves the important responsibilities of such a situation. We would fain not be invidious; but in our experience, it is singular, on an average, how few useful specimens are to be met with amongst clerical ladies; either from delicate health, disinclination to the tasks imposed on the clergyman's wife, or unfitness of some kind, certainly in general they are most incompetent to assist their husbands in their appointed labour of love.

"I fear, Seymour, you spoil Gertrude," said Claud laughing.

"Pray, Francesca, does my brother there, who is putting all this mischief into my good husband's head, enact the tyrant himself at home—do tell me, how does he behave?"

Francesca laughed and said she had better come and judge for herself.

She had been settling with Mr. Seymour

about baptizing her baby that next Sunday, and Claud proposed to his sister that she should accompany her husband to Shirley, and remain a few days. But the one day Gertrude seemed to think would be quite enough.

"A mighty compliment to us, is it not Claud?" Francesca said laughing.

"Well really I will tell you the truth," rejoined Gertrude, "Shirley is a place that would kill me with its gloom for any length of time, yet for the pleasure of being with you all I could endure it, but for one individual of your party, of whom I confess I have such a superstitious horror that I would walk miles to get out of her way. I have been talking to Claud about this Italian girl who seems to stick so fast to you all—and as he seems to have no particular love for her—I do wonder he so tamely submits to the power, with which she seems to have fascinated herself around his home."

Claud coloured—and Francesca tried to change the subject, guessing, as she did, that it could not be a very agreeable one to him, but soon after when Gertrude was alone with her, she again exclaimed,

"Francesca, are you one of those under the spell of the stiletto eyes of La Nice?" and then Francesca did not scruple to unfold her opinion on the subject, and to express her conviction of how much happier Claud and her sister would be without her.

Mrs. Seymour was delighted to find some one to agree with her.

"Mind," she said, when they parted, "you send your baby over to me, whenever you see any symptom of the *mal occhio* upon it."

"I will!" said Francesca, half seriously.

"And you had better come with it."

"Oh no, I shall never leave Shirley till my husband returns. I promised him, that he should find me there, and there I must remain!"

After a pleasant drive, Claud and Francesca arrived at home. The first person they beheld on entering the house, was Giulia returning from a walk, her countenance the picture of gloom, which Francesca perceiving, she stopped short in the animated account she was about to commence of her pleasant expedition; and Nice, standing on the steps whilst they alighted, curiously scanned the countenances of Cland and Francesca. She gazed on that of the young girl, so sweet and beautiful, beaming with the glow of returning health and spirits, which the air and exercise had imparted to it. And then she looked on that of her companion, and the heart which recognised no principle of honor, could scarcely suppose it possible, that he would require much assistance on her part to draw down the longed for vengeance on his devoted head; at least, by the destruction of his own peace of mind; the most severe punishment to a virtuous conscience, the fall-

ing, in his own esteem, even in thought, from honor and integrity.

And even with regard to the innocent Francesca she despaired not. What confidence could Nice feel in the strength of innocence and purity?

It is terrible to witness the quiet inroads which evil passions make upon the heart—how soon it yields itself unrestrained to the works of iniquity—how wave after wave succeeds and washes out every trace of human feeling.

The Seymours came as they had promised the following Sunday, and the baby was baptised in the chapel.

How often does a careless, thoughtless speech add unintentionally as much fuel to an already too strongly kindled fire, as one spoken with intentional malice.

“ Giulia,” said Gertrude, when they happened to be alone, “ how very bold of you it is, to allow your husband to drive that beau-

tiful little sister of yours about the country—why even Seymour has talked so much about her since her visit, that I am quite jealous."

"I am not afraid," said Giulia, trying to smile with unconcern.

Her sister-in-law little knew the pang which accompanied the attempt.

But there was another point upon which Gertrude was equally injudicious. She could not resist giving her opinion, and expressing her aversion to the bosom friend, towards whom her dislike was raised to even a higher pitch, on witnessing the now undisguised manner in which she seemed to put herself forward.

"Giulia," Gertrude remarked, "is your friend Nice to live here for ever? I can assure you it is the worst plan in the world. No good can ever come of a married woman having a bosom friend, and yours certainly appears inclined to rule the roost over you all. I must beg you to pardon me, dear Giulia, but you know, that of old, I never

could manage to get up any love for *la bella* Nice. However I see you think me very impertinent for thus interfering, and certainly it is not my business; but you must remember that I was always famous for speaking my mind. I was talking the subject over with Claud the other day, and—”

“I have no wish certainly to have my private affairs talked over; I consider Claud and myself quite sufficient for their arrangement,” interrupted Lady de Crespigny, colouring violently.

“Oh certainly,” still persisted Gertrude, “if Claud does not object; but are you sure of that? from what I can perceive--”

But remembering that she was perhaps going too far, she broke off in the middle of her speech—and the conversation did not continue.

It certainly had been a most untimely one, for Claud had made up his mind to come to some understanding with Giulia upon the sub-

ject of the Italian girl, and chose the following day for so doing.

He enquired concerning the plans and prospects of Nice, expressed his willingness to do any thing on his part that was requisite for her assistance or welfare, but at the same time, first frankly declared, that he thought it would be more conducive to their domestic happiness that she should not reside amongst them; indeed he made it quite clear, that he **would not allow it much longer.**

There was however in his manner that which soothed the feelings of his listener; such affectionate kindness in his looks and words, and such a flattering reason given for his wishing for the departure of Nice, that Giulia's heart was melted and softened.

Claud told her that he felt almost jealous of any one usurping so much of her time and affection, which ought to be his alone; and in spite of the spell which the girl had wound

around her, Giulia might have listened to him, had it not been for Gertrude's injudicious speech with regard to Francesca, which made her suspect that her husband was acting from the instigation of others, and that probably her sister and himself had planned the scheme during their drive.

The overthrow of her friend hardened her heart against any other softer feelings—she accused him of injustice towards Nice, whose only fault in his eyes arose from her love and fidelity towards herself—did he grudge her that?

"I am not so rich in affection," Giulia added, "to afford to lose one true heart. If Claud, you will drive her from this roof, her only shelter from a fate she dreads and abhors, of course, I cannot prevent it—but it shall never be done with my consent. I have promised her my never failing friendship and protection, and I will not withdraw them. You must take the business entirely into your own hands."

Poor Claud could not advance with much spirit to its execution. At any rate he must have time and consideration as to how it could be managed with the least pain and offence to Giulia, and as to the best means to be taken to draw her from her infatuation. Alas! he should have known that every moment was taken advantage of by that friend, or rather fiend, to strengthen her power, and to wind her victim more firmly in its coils.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Thus I hurl
My dazzling spells into the spongy air,
Of power to cheat the eye with blear illusion,
And give it false presentments,

* * * *

I, under fair pretence of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing courtesy
Baited with reasons not unpleasurable
Wind me into the easy-hearted man
And hug him into snares.”

MILTON’s COMUS.

NICE was not long in perceiving that something was amiss with Giulia after her connubial discussion, and offering her sympathy, and

as Giulia, with an embarrassed and distressed manner, evaded disclosing the subject of her annoyance, the Italian's suspicions arose.

She paused for a moment in thoughtful silence; and then approaching the Baroness, and fixing her fearful eyes upon her face, she said, emphatically---

"I see plainly how it is; my enemies have been at work. Tell me, Giulia, is it not true?"

Giulia answered by her tears.

"Yes, I know," Nice continued, "that I have many enemies in this house, who would gladly rid it of the presence of your friend; and you, Giulia, will passively submit? You cannot do so, however, with honour," and she took from her bosom a sealed packet — "If you do submit, the curse of broken vows—of betrayed friendship, must light upon you. Do you remember this, Giulia?"

"Yes—yes, Nice; and can you think that I would forsake you? No, rather would I for-

sake all," cried Giulia, trembling with violent agitation; "all—but my husband's love."

"Your husband's love! And for that broken reed, you would sacrifice a friendship, firm and unflinching as the rock."

"Broken reed! Gracious Heavens—
Nice!"

"Forgive me, Giulia," Nice continued, rapidly, "I call it a broken reed, comparatively speaking, because man's love *can* change, and, therefore, is but uncertain—I know it, for I have proved it—aye, proved it, as you little know—and in your husband's case! I have kept the tale a secret from you till now—but with the chance of being soon torn from you, I think it my duty to put you on your guard—for your husband, Giulia, is weak, I believe—not wicked! That time, three years' ago, when we were altogether in London—start not Giulia, when I tell you, he sought *my* love—yes, *sought* it; but tremble not, you have nothing to fear on

that head now—it was soon changed to hatred, from which I must now suffer, caused by the rejection and aversion it met with from me. The fickle youth soon turned his attentions towards yourself—and, no doubt, he loved you. I think him not so base, as to imagine he was only swayed by mercenary considerations to seek your hand. Still, I would have you beware of a heart, none of the steadiest; and, I would also have you beware," she continued, in a deep, significant tone, "of yielding to his anxiety to send from you, one, of whose clear-sightedness and watchful friendship, he stands somewhat in awe; and who, from his hatred, he is inclined to consider in the light of a spy. He will not be long burdened with me. And, indeed," she continued, watching with a lynx eye, the effects of the agony she was inflicting on the unhappy Giulia, "if it were not for the interest I take in your happiness—which prevents my forsaking you at this

most critical juncture—rank and affluence are at my disposal, instead of dwelling here in dependance, surrounded by enemies—the object of envy and hatred!"

Nice said no more—she saw that her purpose was achieved. The cruel girl left her friend—her benefactress, writhing in every fibre, from the effects of the gross falsehoods she had dared to whisper in her ear. But Nice was aroused to the expediency of the act, plainly perceiving that Claud was rising up in arms against her ; and also by calculating the chance there now existed, of her designs being cut short by his success in her expulsion. " Though, even then," she inwardly exclaimed, " he shall not escape me—he will find, that in some other way my spell shall be upon him, with even more of deadly vengeance. I *will* not have my long cherished plan overthrown."

But in her own projects and self-interests, Nice had not forgotten that there was another

awaiting her summons to reap fruit at a convenient season, very different from that she longed to cull. She had promised--and that season, in her opinion, was about to arrive. She determined not to let the opportunity escape, and wrote to her priestly uncle. In the meantime, she must begin to exert herself--there were many difficulties in the way.

Claud and Francesca were not much together. The arrangement which had been made concerning their accommodation, in a great manner, prevented this; besides, she could see that Claud was far from seeking her society.

Mrs. Gordon too, was greatly in the way; never leaving her young niece--thus proving an effectual bar--as she had ever been--to her designs. These impediments must be counteracted in some manner.

A design, worthy of a mind like hers, suggested itself to her imagination. Claud ever anxious to gratify, and endeavour to avert by

his attentions, the deep gloom, which, since his last discussion, had settled on his wife's brow, had, in the sultry afternoons which now occurred, offered to read aloud to her in the library.

Into her own sitting-room he seldom intruded ; for there, Nice seemed ever to preside ; and, indeed, Giulia retained her former taste, for the favourite haunt of her childhood, the old gloomy library, and would there, pass most of the day.

The book chosen this afternoon, was one of Byron's poems.

Claud read well ; his voice was fine and clear ; and, moreover, he read as if he felt the subject. Nice now saw the countenance of her too susceptible friend, kindling gradually with awakened enthusiasm, as she sat gazing on the handsome face of her husband, drinking in with breathless attention, the inspirations of the surpassing genius, whose every word glows with the ex-

citing beauty, with which that poet could too often clothe passion--even vice!

Nice looked upon the scene, and the next moment she had glided noiselessly from the room.

She had seen Francesca a short time before in the gallery with her baby; she was still there. The Italian girl informed her that Claud was reading in the library to her sister--would she join the party? And Francesca, thinking that the invitation had been sent to her by Giulia, readily accepted the offer. Silently she entered the room with Nice, and seated herself on a low ottoman--her favorite seat.

Claud perceived not this addition to their party; for, thinking it was only Nice that returned, he did not look up. He read on. The poem was the "Bride of Abydos." He had come to the part when Zuleika pours forth her love and devotion to her supposed brother,

Selim, in those beautiful and impressive words. He read on till he had completed the following stanza :—

“ To soothe thy sickness—watch thy health ;
Partake, but never waste thy wealth.
Or stand with smiles unmurmuring by,
And lighten half thy poverty ;
Do all, but close thy dying eye,
For that, I could not live to try.”

And then, a low murmured exclamation fell upon his ear. He looked up, and there, before him, in the subdued light of the apartment, he distinguished, as it were, the very “fairy form,” of which he had been reading the “child of gentleness”

“ Sweet as the desert fountain’s wave
To lips just cooled in time to save ;
Soft as the memory of buried love ;
Pure as the prayer that childhood wafts above.”

Francesca was bending forward—her lips parted—her eyes glistening through bright

tears of soft emotion. She had never heard such poetry before, nor had she ever heard feelings thus described—the strength and depth of which, she could scarcely have imagined existed so warmly in her own breast—sentiments so well suited to express the love and devotion of a wife for her husband. Her young warm heart glowed with the pure and delicious enthusiasm they inspired, and Claud after a short pause and almost startled gaze at the sudden apparition of her who might have well formed a living picture of the Zuleika of whom he was reading, sent to heighten and assist the powers of imagination, proceeded with the Poem.

And Francesca, as she listened enraptured, identified in her ownself, the Zuleika of the story—her Ernest in the Selim; their love—their feelings, their perils, made her heart beat, her colour vary, her tears flow. They were all her own—her husband's!

Far different from the effect designed—no

whisper came to her heart that a younger—less stern Selim—one more suited to her gentle, youthful, love, might be before her—that the tender, ardent words which came with such expressive effect from the young man's lips, might have sounded sweet to her ears, if from his own heart they had flowed upon her as *his* Francesca.

The Corsair which was next chosen, did not please her so well. She was touched and affected by the devoted love of Conrad and Medora; but the Corsair was not like her Ernest. And then the dark passions, and dreadful deeds of the splendid Gulnare, the manner in which, what *she* considered crime and guilt were disguised, as if to render vice alluring and beautiful—it troubled her pure mind with a vague feeling of discomfort. She did not await the conclusion but ran off to look after her baby.

Francesca told her aunt, as she sat with her infant in her arms, that she had just been hearing some most beautiful poetry, and her cheeks

still retained their flush, her dark eye the trace of those depths of thought and fancy which had just been awakened in her heart.

Mrs. Gordon was not much gratified when she heard who was the author. Beautiful as she allowed the poetry to be, it was not of the description she would have given to one, who had never yet been allowed to read any work of fancy ; her remarks therefore rather tended to cool the ardour of the young enthusiast.

"Aunt Gordon," she said some time after, "there are some lines of that poetry which I cannot help dwelling upon. I peeped into the book just now, to read them over, and there is one passage which quite terrifies me—

"The war of elements no fears impart
To love, whose deadliest bane is human art."

Oh ! my aunt, do you think it possible that human art or malice could ever interrupt such love as mine and Ernest's?"

CHAPTER IX.

“ He spoke of victory
* * * * *
Now joy old England raise!
For the tidings of thy might,
By the festal cities’ blaze,
While the wine cup shines in light !”

CAMPBELL.

IT was now that poor Francesca began to feel the real agony of mind doomed ever to be the portion of a soldier’s wife in times of peril. Tidings reached Shirley Hall, of the engage-

ment between the English and French on the 16th of June. All England was in a state of excitement and expectation as to what might follow. The feelings of all who had those dear to them in our brave army, may easily be imagined, and none felt more keenly the anxiety of such a moment than Francesca.

Claud all kindness and anxiety rode over every day to the Town of—— to bring her the latest intelligence, and she would remain until his return in a state of pitiable nervousness and restlessness, wandering about from room to room, into the gallery and corridor, weeping over her baby or in the arms of her kind Aunt who strove to strengthen and support her, Giulia she scarcely saw, and when they did meet, her own absorption of mind, prevented her noting or caring for ought of coldness or lack of kindness in her sister's manner.

At length it was the third evening since the first intelligence had reached them, and

Claud was later than usual in returning from D——. Francesca stood in the gallery listening to every sound, most agitated and nervous. A moment after, however, he appeared before her somewhat unexpectedly, for Giulia had just passed through, and not being able to avoid remaining to say a few words to her distressed young sister, had diverted her attention for a few moments; Giulia however, paused when her husband entered.

"Francesca!" he exclaimed, "a glorious battle has been fought, and your husband we have every reason to hope, is safe and well."

Francesca lifted up her eyes in gratitude to Him who she had been taught to fear and love as the Author of all good, and then the tears gushed from her eyes, and with the natural impulse of her heart on any sudden overflow of grief or joy, she sprang forward to pour them forth on some kind and sympathizing bosom. True her sister stood by, but alas! it was not to her that she felt inclined to turn

for participation in her thanksgiving; no wonder then, that she threw herself into the arms of her kind friend, the indulgent, affectionate playmate of her earliest days—the warm hearted brother, who had brought her the blessed tidings! And none of the now assembled group who had hurried together at the report of the joyful intelligence, thought of looking upon the action at that moment in any other light, than the natural impulse of her innocent, grateful heart—not even the starch Mrs. Rivers, who had witnessed the scene, tears glistening in her usually stern eyes. But there is no deed, however harmless and guiltless in itself, which may not be turned, so as to be used as a weapon for calumny and mischief. One indeed whose jaundiced eyes viewed the scene, saw it in a different light, and turned away with a dark and offended air.

As for Claud, what might have been his feelings, when he felt once more the fair arms

of his dear little playmate round his neck, it is difficult to assert, but he only laughed and coloured, as he used to do when a boy, after such little ebullitions of feeling in his young companion. When Francesca had extricated herself from his arms she turned to her aunt, who had joined the party.

“ Mrs. Rivers, we must make some rejoicing to-night,” said Claud soon after, “ pray let the servants have a dance in the hall, and plenty of wine or punch, or whatever they like, to drink the health of our brave hero.”

His orders were obeyed. About nine o’clock Mrs. Rivers appeared in the library, and with grave formality requested the ladies to honour the hall with their presence, the household being anxious to testify their respect, by drinking the respective healths of the family ; and Lady de Crespigny signifying her pleasure to agree to this request, Claud ran up stairs to summon Francesca and Mrs. Gordon to join their party.

He found them watching over the baby in the absence of its nurses, who were joining in the revelry below, but the young gentleman, as if sharing in the general excitement, had awakened, and was defeating their, not very expert attempts, to restore him to his slumbers.

Claud, laughingly, insisted that the baby should accompany them, and return thanks for his father, whose warlike deeds were now in celebration, and Francesca delightedly acquiesced.

They wrapped the infant in its christening mantle, put on its smartest cap, and soon joined Lady de Crespigny, who received her little nephew with no great cordiality ; remarking coldly that she thought such late hours must be extremely injurious to the child.

The party proceeded to the hall. Claud having relieved the little mother of the burden of her babe on approaching the assembled household, exclaimed, holding up the infant to their view—

"Here, good people, is a young gentleman, who, as the son of Colonel Vavasour, one of our Waterloo heroes, begs to propose a toast; at least, I will give it in his name."

There was a murmur amongst the domestics of—

"God bless the pretty creature!" and the glasses being filled, they added to the proposed toast. "Long live the son of the gallant Colonel Vavasour—may he be as brave as his father."

Every heart was excited to greater enthusiasm, by the sight of the glistening eyes of the fair young mother, who took her child from Claud, and pressed it to her heart, half tears, half smiles.

Some one of the party in the excitement of the moment, exclaimed—

"Long live our young heir, the future Baron de Crespigny!"

But this, Francesea felt, was, indeed, going too far, to be very pleasing either to

Claud or her sister; and meeting Mrs. Rivers's eye, she shook her head as if in sign that she should stop it; at the same time, giving the baby to the nurse to be carried off.

The healths of the Baroness and Mr. Hamilton were then drank with great propriety, and afterwards followed that of Mrs. Vavasour.

In spite of the prejudice common to servants in favour of their reigning master or mistress—particularly, when there is any spirit of rivalry existing in an establishment, one party, perhaps, being considered interlopers by the other—the feelings of the household of Shirley Hall, all inclined in love and admiration to the amiable Francesca. The fact of her being a mother, whilst the Baroness had, as yet, given no hopes of such an event, greatly increased their interest concerning her.

But there was one amongst them, however, in whom the evil genius of the place had contrived to infuse a portion of her baneful spirit.

She was an Italian—the woman who was mentioned as accompanying Nice to the chapel, at the commencement of the story.

She had been, by the interest of Nice, raised to the situation of lady's maid to Lady de Crespigny on her marriage. Resembling herself greatly in character the Italian girl found her countrywoman, an easy, and willing tool to assist in all her foul purposes. Everything inadvertently said by the servants, which might add fuel to the unhappy Giulia's jealousy, was whispered artfully into her ear ; and the natural and excusable feeling of anxiety, on the subject of being a mother, was becoming daily, an insufferable torture, which deepened the aversion with which the wretched sister began to regard the poor Francesca. And this night to have seen Claud with the child in his arms before the whole assembled household ! and then, to hear it hailed as the future Baron de Crespigny ! The remembrance goaded her almost to frenzy, and it scarcely required the

addition, of Nice and the Italian servant's insinuations, of the remarks, and the effect which the scene had produced amongst the domestics, to render her feelings more fierce and bitter. The very sight of the child, henceforth—particularly when noticed by her husband—was torture not to be endured.

CHAPTER X.

"Contention
Madly hath broke loose
And bears down all before him."

SHAKSPEARE.

A fortnight had passed.

Francesca had not been well; and was ordered extreme quiet—a circumstance which had served Mrs. Gordon and herself, as an excuse during the last few evenings, for keeping to their private apartments, and to decline join-

ing the rest of the party in the library. This was a great relief to Mrs. Gordon and her young niece, for of late, so ominous a gloom had gathered around the party below, their intercourse had assumed, imperceptibly, so disagreeable a footing, that Francesca and her aunt, were only too glad to confine themselves to the peaceful serenity of their own cheerful rooms, where they had constant interest in the little babe, who, every day became more dear to both the little mama, and great aunt.

The fact was that having succeeded in shaking the confidence of the miserable Giulia, in the honour and constancy of her husband's love, it was easy for the wicked Nice to increase her dominion over her misguided friend. All the household began to feel the effects of her power, and to discern who was fast becoming the reigning mistress.

Poor Claud had been again annoyed by an-

other painful contest with Giulia, one in which however he had remained firm.

She had informed him that the uncle of her friend Nice, had written to beg that he might visit his niece, and requested her husband's acquiescence to her receiving him for a few days.

To this Claud had placed a decided veto.

"Your friend, Giulia," he said, "you retain against my known wishes; let us at least be free from your *friend's friends*, particularly one of whose Jesuitical machinations I do not wish my wife again to become the mark. Indeed, I consider it my duty towards all within this house, to forbid his entrance into it."

Nice had been quite prepared for this refusal; she wished only for a further opportunity to widen the encreasing breach between the husband and wife by the opposition which she knew Claud would make to her uncle's proposed visit, an opposition for which she an-

her relative had provided a counteracting expedient.

From that time matters became darker and darker. Giulia became gloomy and morose in the extreme. After the shortest absence of her husband from her presence, she would greet him with a countenance of reproach and suspicion.

For the last few days, she had been closeted for hours with Nice in her sitting-room, and there had even passed half the night. To Claud's enquiries as to the cause of these strange proceedings, his questions had been received by Giulia with evident embarrassment and perturbation. He could not much longer endure this state of domestic affairs—he was determined to take some decided measure to put a stop to it.

In the meantime it was but natural that he should often seek the companionship of those kind and gentle beings, whose presence was like sunshine after storms, and with whom

he experienced cheerfulness and peace, smiles and innocent gaiety in exchange for the chilling constraint of gloom, and far worse, the companionship of the serpent, who was poisoning the atmosphere of his home.

On the night we have before mentioned the trio sat in the gloomy library.

Claud had been wandering out of doors after dinner on that fine June evening. He would fain have invited Giulia to have accompanied him—his was a heart that could not endure this miserable manner of existing with one whom he had wished to love. Fain would he have tried the influence of the calm, balmy evening to soften her heart, and bring her back to reason.

He remembered that when a girl, he had often dispelled the gloom from her brow by a few kind words. But now she was with the Italian girl, and he would only doubtless have had to endure the basilisk glance which would triumphantly accompany a cold gloomy excuse

from the Baroness. So he had wandered out alone—the outward peace and beauty of all around, only making his heart feel heavier, and more oppressed. Solitude brought with it even more troubled and repining thoughts. He reflected upon the fate he was now enduring—a just retribution for having thus sacrificed himself, and for what? How gladly would he have exchanged all this gilded misery for his relinquished poverty and independence—his life of freedom, cheered by the fresh bright hopes of youth—alas! now destroyed for ever! — happy, unfettered days of peace!

“ Mother! Mother!” the unhappy young man murmured, as sadly he returned with slow, lingering steps towards his dismal home—“ This has been your work—but it was done in fancied kindness.”

His heart ever softened when he thought of a mother he so fondly loved, and to reproach her for any act, he would have deemed sacrilege.

As Claud approached nearer to the house, he heard a voice at the window above his head, and looking up, he saw Francesca with her baby in her arms. She spoke to him a few cheerful words, to which he answered, but soon turned away. He was not even in spirits to speak to her. Indeed the sight of her affectionate countenance seemed only to render him still more sad. He entered the library, and exerted himself to strive to draw Giulia into conversation.

Once or twice he saw her eyes turned towards him with an expression of affection not to be mistaken—her voice assuming a tender softening tone when he spoke to her, and she was obliged to make a reply; but soon a chilling constraint again crept over them, as a few significantly uttered words, or a silent glance of the glittering eyes watching them, would make the husband and wife feel the blighting presence of the third person.

At length, Claud, in despair, giving up the attempt, took up a book.

But whilst his eyes were fixed on the volume, his mind was waxing into impatience—he would endure no longer this wretched manner of existing.

Suddenly he dashed aside the book—arose—and with a heated countenance left the room.

Claud was not so constituted as to feel any inclination to betake himself to loneliness to brood over his troubles. To his warm, open heart accustomed to sociability and companionship, solitude under his present feelings was insupportable. He knew there was one portion of that old house—whose dismal stillness as he passed from the dark library oppressed him more than ever with its gloom—in which he was sure to find light, loveliness and cheerfulness.

He had often of late found himself almost unconsciously bending his steps thither—and

there he now betook himself. Claud passed down the Eastern Corridor, and knocking at the school-room door, opened it, and entered.

Francesca was reclining somewhat pensively on the sofa, looking at her husband's picture which she held in her hand; it was her sole companion, for her aunt had retired to bed, having a severe head-ache. Francesca held out her hand to Claud in welcome, and said she was delighted to see him, for she was beginning to feel very lonely; but when he had seated himself, and endeavoured to speak in his usual tone, she soon found by his troubled, harassed expression and forced spirits that something was amiss.

She had only that evening, as she watched him from the window, walking so sad and solitary, remarked with a sigh to her aunt, that "poor Claud looked very unhappy, and that it made her quite wretched to see him so changed in spirits, as he had been of late."

From an instinctive delicacy between the

aunt and niece, they had as much as possible refrained from talking over the domestic affairs of those, amongst whom they were dwelling, but as guests, and still more did they shrink from inviting the confidence of Claud — whose situation nevertheless greatly excited their sympathy — still Francesca could not wholly refrain from venting a portion of her indignant feelings, upon the true source of all this evil, and wishing fervently that something could be done, to put an end to Nice's pernicious influence. She even proposed to her aunt that she should write to Mr. Hamilton, and ask him to come down and assist his son in his difficult position. But Mrs. Gordon was scrupulous in thus interfering in so delicate a business. She thought it more expedient to leave it to Claud's own good sense and firmness, on which she much relied, to arrest the further progress of this most dangerous state of affairs.

Acting on this principle, Francesca even

now—though it grieved her gentle heart to see her once joyous playmate so evidently suffering from distress of mind, and would have readily offered him her sympathy, even her tears—now rather strove to divert his attention from his grievances, by her innocent cheerfulness and playful conversation.

Claud endeavoured at first to meet her in her design, for he felt its kind intent, but presently found himself gazing in silent abstraction on Francesca, who soon saw the necessity of still further exertion on her part, and as her companion's spirits sunk lower and lower, she chatted on, her silvery voice sounding sweetly on his ear.

These might have been dangerous moments to a person under less trying circumstances than Claud, and many an extenuating thought might easily have suggested itself, in order to lull his conscience into the passive admittance of feelings, fatal to his peace and rectitude of mind. Alone with that lovely young creature

who perhaps never had appeared to his eyes so attractive as now when she reclined on her sofa, her white dress flowing round her, over which strayed, here and there, a jetty curl, her sweet face turned upon him! And to feel that her kindness---her smiles were all for him---were all designed to raise him from his sadness!

But there is always a guardian spirit watching over the paths of the well-principled, to deliver them from the temptations, which in the hour of weakness, may assail the firmest mind. Perhaps, it was the knowledge of his own weakness, which caused the young man to turn abruptly from Francesca, and lean his head upon his hand, and remain for a few moments silent—

"Pale—mute—and mournfully sedate."

Francesca rallied him on his ill-humor, as she playfully chose to term his sadness, till he was able to smile even, at length, by

that "playfulness of sorrow," to which we before alluded, was he moved to laughter—laughter, even at the wretchedness of his own heart.

But no longer able to repress his pent up feelings, he exclaimed—

"Francesca, I am, indeed, very wretched!"

"Oh! dear Claud! do not say so!" she cried, in a tone of anxious kindness, which quite overcame his equanimity.

"Yes, Francesca, most miserable; and I can bear it no longer." And then, energetically, almost passionately, he poured forth all his complaints; declaring, that if Giulia persisted any longer in allowing Nice to remain with her, he must leave his home.

"Giulia," he added, much excited, "is rapidly estranging my affections from her by the conduct she pursues; she must soon make her choice—decide which she will retain—her friend or her husband!"

Francesca was much distressed; she strove

to allay his violent agitation, by gentle, persuasive words. She implored him to be like himself, good and gentle, and besought him to consult his father, who, no doubt, would put an end to all his annoyances by judicious advice. Above all she implored him not to deprive Giulia of his love.

"That would be very—very wrong, dear Claud," she added, "for remember she is your wife—you must make allowances for her. Giulia is, I am quite convinced, under the influence of an evil power; when that is removed all will no doubt be well. Giulia loves you, Claud, I am sure, most devotedly."

Whilst Francesca spoke, Claud sat, his elbow resting on the little table beside her, his brow leaning upon his hand. She had bent forwards to note the effect her words were producing on his half averted countenance, and had placed her hand gently on his arm to add energy to her persuasion, when, at that very moment, the door opened, and Giulia stood before them.

Francesca was on the point of exclaiming cheerfully,

“ Ah, Giulia, are you come to look after your husband?” but Nice was close behind her friend, and the sight of that countenance seemed to freeze the words on her tongue. Then it was that Francesca also observed the deadly pallor of her sister’s countenance, but she saw it only for an instant.

Nice had advanced no further than the door, which she stood holding open with a fiendish sneer upon her face—the next moment Giulia had turned away, and passed through it, and the door closed upon them both.

“ You see, Francesca, how it is—is this to be supported?” Claud exclaimed, after they had gazed upon each other in silent dismay.

“ It is indeed dreadful,” replied Francesca, tearfully, imagining that it was the unexpected sight of Claud, with whom she must have had some serious quarrel that had caused this most singular conduct on

Giulia's part—for it was her custom to pay her sister a formal visit every night previously to retiring to rest, therefore her appearance was not unusual. Whether or not Claud suspected otherwise, certain it was, that he became still more troubled than before, and almost immediately wished Francesca good-night, and departed.

CHAPTER XI.

"The mother rose, and sought her heir,
She saw the nurse, like one possest
With wringing hands, and sobbing breast,
Sure some disaster has befel ;
Speak, nurse ! I hope the boy is well ?"

GAY'S FABLES.

THE following morning Mrs. Gordon entered Francesca's room with a letter in her hand the contents of which filled her niece with dismay, and greatly perplexed and distressed herself.

Her late husband had left an only sister,

very much his junior ; she had made an unfortunate marriage, and now was dying childless, nearly friendless, and besides her brother's widow she had none to care for her.

The dying woman had sent an affecting appeal to Mrs. Gordon to come to her. It was a request, against which the kind lady's feelings of compassion forbade her to close her ears ; she also remembered the last wishes of her husband, who made her promise on his death-bed never to forsake his sister. But to leave Francesca equally militated against her inclination, and her ideas of duty. However her young niece greatly aided her to decide, after her own first selfish feelings of consternation had somewhat abated, at the idea of losing her aunt's society. She saw at once that it was only consideration for herself which made her waver in her determination, and the good feeling of Francesca, soon placed the matter in a proper light before her mind.

A dying, friendless, woman! was she not to be considered before herself—what claims had she on her aunt's presence to rival this appeal? She was certain her husband would have viewed the subject in the same manner.

The calm reasoning of this young, but sensible being, soon decided Mrs. Gordon, and although the resolution caused her the greatest pain, she determined to go.

It was impossible to contemplate leaving Francesca under the present uncomfortable circumstances without extreme annoyance. She however knew little of the real extent of the mischief which was accumulating around the poor young wife; discomfort was the greatest evil which Mrs. Gordon dreaded for her, and she would fain have warded from her dearly loved niece every shadow of even annoyance, by her exertions and support.

Francesca had imparted to her aunt the account of her scene with Claud the night before, and the extraordinary conduct of Giulia,

which much perplexed Mrs. Gordon ; however, she was inclined to put the same construction upon the subject as Francesca had done, in her innocent recital.

Buonaparte's fall seeming now certain, a nearer prospect would be afforded to Colonel Vavasour of being at liberty ; and before her departure, Mrs. Gordon wrote to inform him of the unfortunate event which obliged her to leave Francesca for a time. She added that she hoped if there were no chance of his returning *immediately* to England, he would authorise her to make some alteration in the arrangements he had made for his wife, for she considered that her removal from Shirley Hall would, for many reasons, be expedient.

Claud heard of Mrs. Gordon's intended departure with grave regret.

On taking leave of Giulia, her aunt, who had not seen her for some days, was struck with the alteration in her looks, and with the expression of her dilated eyes, and anxious

countenance. She professed no sorrow or surprise at her aunt's departure, and with a cold, distrustful air received her kind parting expressions of anxiety concerning her health. Mrs. Gordon would fain have said more on many subjects, but the presence of Nice rendered it impossible to speak openly. She remarked to Claud afterwards upon the ill looks of the Baroness. With an air of grave determination, he replied, that he should go to London in a few days, and hoped to take some effectual method of restoring Giulia to herself.

With Mrs. Rivers, Mrs. Gordon had also some private conversation. To her especial care she recommended Francesca, to whom she gave some parting advice with regard to her conduct during this unavoidable absence.

"I would have you endeavour to seek your sister's society as much as possible, dearest, both at meals and in the evening when well enough; it may be disagreeable to your feelings, but it is better than your being all day alone,

and you cannot now have Mr. Hamilton as your companion."

No more was necessary she knew to say on that subject; indeed if Francesca's innocent heart did not understand the full force of this argument, she relied implicitly on Claud's discretion and right judgment.

Mrs. Gordon quitted Shirley with the same feeling of ominous depression, which had so saddened her heart when she first arrived at that dismal abode years ago, to take upon herself the charge of the two young beings she was now leaving.

And poor Francesca! painful were her sensations of loneliness! All that day she saw no one, but her child and its attendants, excepting indeed Mrs. Rivers, who respectfully recommended her to take a drive. Francesca however felt no inclination to do so. The weather was hot and sultry. She saw Claud occasionally from the window, sauntering slowly over the lawn, but he would only glance quickly

towards her with a serious expression of countenance. She did not go down to dinner, nor in the evening, for the baby was not very well. The next day the child still continued ailing, and her anxiety for him was increased by the grave looks of the old nurse who superintended the charge of the little boy ; once, upon Francesca's entering the nursery, she found Mrs. Rivers there speaking in a tone of grave reproof. On her leaving the room, Mrs. Vavasour enquired what was the matter—"I am sure," she added, "something is amiss, for both you nurse and Hannah have looked the picture of misery and mystery the whole of the day—you do not I trust think my baby very ill?"

The nurse shook her head and then said—

"My dear young lady, in spite of what Mrs. Rivers says, I think it my duty to speak out. There is great enmity and jealousy in this house against those who don't deserve it—but we all know who is at the bottom of all the mischief—and so does Mrs. Rivers, if she chose to say so, and those wicked Italians

should not be allowed to plot against the innocent."

"What do you mean?" cried Francesca in great alarm.

The nurse then proceeded to inform her that ever since the rejoicings after the battle, there had been very disagreeable words down stairs amongst the servants, for Martuccia, Lady de Crespigny's maid, had reported that her ladyship was much offended at the child having been toasted as the heir, and the Italian had abused Francesca's footman, who had been the person who gave the toast. "They quarrelled," the nurse continued, "and in her rage, Martuccia said, that our beautiful boy, who is getting on so well, and is larger than many children, twice his age, would never thrive—was a puny creature; not very likely, she added, (with the sneer of a fiend) ever to be *the heir* that they would see whether he would or not; and sure it is that ever since that time the child has been ailing."

Francesca listened with blanched cheeks.

"And," continued nurse, "God forgive me for the notion, but I have never been happy in my mind, since the nursery maid told me, that Martuccia stopped her the other day, when she was carrying a jug of milk for the baby's food, and taking it from her hand, drank from it. Had I but known it," cried the old woman, vehemently, her wrath rising with the subject, "would I not have thrown every remaining drop out of the window, and the jug after it? The very lips of such a creature as that, carry venom in them. And then in the gallery the day before, when I was walking up and down with the darling, La Signora Nice stopped, a thing she never does to look at our boy, and she fixed her great black eyes upon him, and said, quite cheerfully, 'that he certainly looked very ill.' I walked on, for I could not bear to let her gaze in such a manner upon the child. The Baroness passed too, but she walked on, and did not even turn her eyes

our way. Ah, my dear lady, I wish the Colonel would come and take us away from a place where we get neither good nor welcome. Oh! that we were but well out of it!"

Francesca burst into tears. The nurse wept also.

"If I were you, Ma'am," she continued, "I would just let us pack up our things and be off to London, or somewhere, for you little think, dear lady, what devilry there is in those people. I have seen enough of them in my day, when my lord and lady had those tribes of Italians about them. There is nothing they will hesitate to do, if urged on by revenge or jealousy, and now that we are alone without your aunt, left to their mercy—"

"Nurse," exclaimed the terrified young mother, "I have promised Colonel Vavasour to remain here till his return—and I cannot—I dare not break any promise I have made to him. But," she exclaimed with sudden animation, "I will tell you what I will do, nurse,

if my child is hated and abused, it shall not stay here," and the young mother's eyes flashed fire—"He shall go to Mrs. Seymour, who once asked me to send him to her if he required any change. There, he will, at least, be safe and kindly regarded."

"That will be a good plan," said the nurse, brightening up, "but still I shall be loath to leave you behind, dear lady, with all these dreadful people."

But Francesca, at that moment, lost all thought of self. The mother's feelings now occupied every idea, and influenced all her actions. Every impulse of her nature was roused. She was no longer the timid, childish girl, but the excited mother, who would willingly brave all—bear all, rather than a breath of harm should visit her child! She sent for Mrs. Rivers, and told her what she had determined.

The old woman looked grave and perplexed, and advised Mrs. Vavasour to do nothing

so hastily—tried to convince the nervous, frightened young creature, that more than half that the nurse had told her was merely fancy, but Francesca was firm. She had already written to Mrs. Seymour, and she desired Mrs. Rivers immediately to despatch the note. It was as follows :—

“ MY DEAR GERTRUDE,

“ Will you kindly receive my darling child, as you once offered to do? He is not well, but I know he will be safe with you. I am low and nervous, and nurse has put all sort of horrors into my head, touching the ‘*mal occhio*.’ If any thing did happen to him, and Ernest was never to see his boy !

“ How I wish I could accompany him, and stay with you at your pretty, happy home, for when Claud goes to London what will become of me? I promised Ernest that he should find me here — and here I must remain, but

may God speed his return, for I am very weary and miserable, &c., &c., &c."

An answer was brought to her, which decided the business, and the nurse commenced her preparations for the departure of the child on the morrow.

Francesca and Claud were standing that evening at the window in the gallery; he was talking in a low, earnest tone--Francesca was weeping. She had left her room on hearing his step, to ask him to allow a pair of horses to be put to his carriage in order to convey her baby the next morning to the vicarage.

Claud looked surprised and grave, and asked what were her reasons for this strange determination. She had turned away her head weeping. She wished not to grieve him, and was silent.

Claud sighed heavily; he saw too well how it all was, and gravely and earnestly entreated

her to bear with all a little longer. He would not ask her, he said, to remain in a house which must be so odious, from the conduct of those around her, but he was determined that she should not be driven from under the roof which he had promised her husband should be a home to her during his absence; and in a few days he hoped that the aspect of affairs would wear an improved appearance.

Whilst they were speaking, the dinner bell rang, and as they thus stood Giulia issued from the eastern corridor on her way to the dining-room. She turned her face towards them, and Francesca was shocked by seeing the expression of utter wretchedness which her countenance bespoke. Forgetting all but the natural impulse of her kind feeling heart, remembering that it was her only sister who stood before her, she sprang forward, seized her hand, joined it with that of Claud, and exclaimed—

“ Dear Giulia, be happy in your husband’s love--he loves you—be happy together.”

A step was heard behind them, and, as if it had been from the grasp of a viper, Giulia shook her hand from her sister’s hold, and passed on, followed by Nice.

CHAPTER XII.

" Now they assail thee, an insidious band,
Awake! and don thy stainless panoply,
Lest all too late unmasked, their legions stand
In open war, for 'gainst the witchery
Of falsehood's silvered tongue, deception's art,
Nought but the talisman of faith may charm thy heart."

MARIE ANTOINETTE LAWRENCE.

THE next morning the infant with its two nurses left Shirley Hall.

Poor Francesca had quite repented of her hasty decision when the time arrived for the departure of her little darling, and had it

not been for the old nurse, who would hear of no change, in a plan which she thought so every way expedient, the carriage would have been countermanded, and the baby sent back to its nursery.

The poor, young mother did indeed feel an agonizing sensation of desolation; it was almost more than she could endure, and she began to question the wisdom of a step which had been taken in such inconsiderate haste under the impulse of strong excitement. In that large, desolate house, no one now remained who cared for her, save Claud and the old House-keeper, and the former of late seemed rather to shun her society. This she considered but the effects of his own cares weighing upon his spirits, but certainly his manner was somewhat altered towards her---more constrained, and cold, she could almost have fancied; and Mrs. Rivers, though Francesca knew her heart was kindly disposed towards her, still in her softest mood, the old woman's bearing was severe and for-

bidding. Even when in the first paroxysm of Francesca's sorrow after the departure of the child, and Mrs. Rivers stood by in the character of comforter, it was with cold and measured reasoning, rather than soothing words, that she sought to compose the wounded heart of the poor young mother.

Mrs. Rivers also took this opportunity of gravely advising Mrs. Vavasour upon the mode of conduct it would be most advisable for her to pursue under a state of affairs -- which she added---she had hoped her old eyes would never have lived to behold.

"Young lady," she continued, "let me respectfully suggest to you, that it would be much more seemly in the sight of the household, if you would appear at the family meals, and not so entirely absent yourself from your sister's society—it gives rise to unpleasant talk amongst the servants. And," she concluded with a marked, ominous tone of warning, "the strictest discretion, the most cautious avoid-

ance of ought which in the remotest degree may seem to militate against decorum is now imperatively required from you, for truly you are in a nest of hornets."

Poor Francesca trembled at the awful manner in which this speech was delivered, although she guessed not its fearful import.—She little knew the serious cause which had called it forth—little was she aware, that the worthy woman had been deeply hurt, by the whispered insinuations set afloat amongst the servants concerning the domestic state of the family, and that the miserable terms on which the Baroness and her husband now existed, were attributed to the influence of the young and innocent being, that had wound herself so closely round the chilled heart of the old servant, who indeed looked upon her and her infant as the last remnants of the race whose dignity and superiority had from her childhood been the absorbing interest of her heart.

The present representative of the house — what a sad falling off was there ! A childless mother, who daily became more inaccessible to all save the hated Italian girl, and her myrmidon Martuccia ! All rule was gradually usurped by them ; and worse — on the score of religion, Mrs. Rivers saw much mischief in prospect, and trembled ! All this was bitterness to her, and seemed to have encreased the sternness of the old woman's nature.

Francesca passed a day of loneliness, cheered however towards the evening by a visit from Claud, who brought her intelligence that the allies were rapidly advancing towards Paris, and hope again brightened her heart. In obedience to Mrs. Rivers's advice, when the dinner bell sounded, she descended to the dining-room.

The trio, consisting of the Baroness, Claud and Nice, had just sat down to the wretched mockery, under such circumstances, of a meal,

when the light, young form of Francesca, in her pure, white dress, and flowing hair, appeared amongst them. Her step, however, was less buoyant than was her wont—her countenance somewhat sad, as she glanced, with a half timid and doubting look on the party. It was the first time for many a day, that she had joined the repast; but the servants had been informed of her intention of doing so that evening, and a seat was prepared, into which she glided.

She was scarcely seated, when a movement took place at the table. She looked up, and the servants stood staring in astonishment. Lady de Crespigny with an expression of countenance, never to be forgotten by those who beheld it, had risen slowly—the Italian girl did the same—and had advanced towards the door, through which—the attendants having recovered themselves and hastened to open it—they passed.

An awful pause succeeded. Francesca, turn-

ing very pale, glanced at Claud with an air of astonishment and dismay.

The blood had rushed in torrents over the brow of Claud, which was succeeded by an expression of indignant anger, such as, perhaps, never before had clouded that benignant countenance. In a voice of stern command, which echoed through the spacious room, and sounded like thunder in the deep stillness, he called to the servants to hand Mrs. Vavasour her soup, and then continued his own dinner—his trembling companion attempting to assume the appearance of doing the same.

Occasionally, whilst the servants remained in the room, he made some indifferent remark, in a voice as steady and composed as he could command, to which the low, faltering voice of Francesca attempted to respond.

The wretched dinner at length concluded.

Claud arose and walked to the window; when he again turned from it Francesca was gone. She had returned, poor soul, to her

lonely, deserted rooms, and there sat musing through all that bright summer evening with vague misgivings of some undefined mischief hanging over her head, sighing for her baby, and longing for Sunday, when Mr. Seymour would come over and tell her all about the darling child. And when she thought of her husband! Oh! how her terrified heart panted for his presence!

She was indeed bereft—all—all were gone—her kind aunt—her last comfort—she was truly alone!

With a wan and anxious smile Francesca stretched out her face to catch the cool evening breeze, which was, she trusted, at the same moment, breathing with its cooling freshness on her husband, after a weary march on that sultry day. She would now and then, for a brief moment, lose all thoughts of present darkness in the bright anticipations of his return, and the remembrance of his love.

At length she rose, rang her bell, and Mrs. Rivers entered.

Francesca said she would go to bed; it was early, but she had nothing to keep her up.

"Your advice did not turn out very propitious, my dear Mrs. Rivers," she said, with a slight tone of petulance, "my appearance at dinner produced a very extraordinary effect."

Mrs. Rivers looked graver than ever—her lip quivered as if about to speak, but she remained silent till Francesca asked her to send her maid.

The housekeeper then asked her if she would allow her to sleep in the adjoining room as she might feel it lonely.

"No, dear Mrs. Rivers," Francesca replied, "I have often heard you say, that you never have slept in any other than your own apartment these hundred of years, and that you never could close your eyes elsewhere; so I will not allow you to lose your night's rest, and I am too intimately acquainted with all

the ghosts in this house to be easily frightened," she added smiling. "But I forgot that I shall be left alone to share this corridor with the real evil spirit of this mansion—so perhaps I had better have Jane to sleep in the dressing-room — it may take off the disagreeable idea of the odious vicinity of such a neighbour."

Mrs. Rivers again shook her head with more ominous gravity than ever.

Francesca proceeded to her room. With a dejected spirit she sought her pillow, but her heart was pure, and her thoughts hallowed by communion with that God, to whom she had commended herself, her husband, her child, and all she loved.

Claud, as soon as Francesca had quitted him, walked with a determined countenance to his wife's sitting room, which he at once entered. He had not been in that apartment for several days, and its aspect was somewhat altered.

It had never been more than scantily furnished for Lady de Crespigny's use, almost all the Italian furniture having been packed up to be sent to the place in Berkshire. The picture of the late Lady de Crespigny and her children still hung on the wall, but the portrait was now always concealed by a green curtain.

The object which immediately attracted Claud's attention was the large golden crucifix, which he remembered was always his admiration when, as a boy, he had visited the late Lady de Crespigny, now placed opposite to Giulia's seat, below the beautiful picture of the Madonna and child; he also remarked a cushion on which lay an open book and handkerchief, as if some one had been kneeling there; on lifting up the book he saw it was a Roman Catholic missal, in which Giulia's name seemed to have been recently written.

Claud replaced it in silence; he looked round

and saw Nice standing behind him. He started as if he had seen an adder on his path, and then was passing on hastily to leave the room.

"Lady Crespigny is indisposed, and does not wish to be disturbed," said that hateful voice in his ear.

Claud then went to the library, rang the bell, and ordered a carriage and post horses for the following morning early.

He began to write some letters. One was to his sister, Mrs. Seymour, beseeching her to receive Mrs. Vavasour for a few days; he entered into no explanation, but said, that by the end of that time, his father would, he hoped, be at Shirley.

The other letter was addressed to Giulia, and merely stated his intention of going to London the following morning—his father, he added, would be at Shirley in a few days to make certain arrangements, and until they were completed he should not return—he

added, that if she wished to see him before his departure, and would favour him with a *private interview*, he should be happy to attend her summons.

To this letter he received no answer.

Towards the end of the evening he passed down the eastern corridor to the school-room, where he met Mrs. Vavasour's maid, who informed him, on his enquiring for her mistress, that she had retired to rest. Claud said it was of no consequence, and the maid departed.

He entered the school-room, sat down at the writing-table, and wrote a note to Francesca, informing her of the step he had taken, and entreating her to go to his sister until his father's arrival.

Having done this, he sat leaning his head upon his hand by the open window—dejected and oppressed.

The young man remained for some time, musing upon all the vexatious circumstances

which surrounded him. His mind, harassed and fatigued, was, however, at length lulled by the calm stillness of the night—broken only by the gentle waving of the trees without, stirred by the evening breeze—and soon a deep sleep stole over him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Even as an adder, when she doth unroll
To do some fatal execution—
Vengeance is in my heart—death in my hand—
Blood and revenge are hammering in my head."

SHAKSPEARE.

THE wretched Giulia, really ill from the state of mind into which she had been excited, had retired for the night when the note from Claud was carried to her apartments. It was received by Nice—opened and read.

No greater torture, perhaps, can be imagined, than the pang which the wicked heart endures, when the designs, which, in order to accomplish, the soul has sunk itself deeper and deeper into baseness, threaten to be scattered to the dust; the sin remaining upon the conscience, but its fruit blighted ere it has fully ripened. Nice felt a presentiment that such was likely to be her case.

In the departure of Claud, and the arrival of Mr. Hamilton, her scheme would be for ever frustrated—and what would she have achieved? nought, but having made herself odious to all.

True, one was an effectual victim—her unhappy tool—the unfortunate Giulia! She had, certainly, destroyed the present happiness of her intended prey—but still the work was incomplete, for the evil that had, hitherto, been accomplished, was not irremediable. She could not believe that the whispers which her art had succeeded in spreading already amongst the

household, would weigh much in blasting the good name of those whom they involved. Some desperate act might do it all—but what must that act be?

The fiend, in woman's form, mused until she heard Claud's step entering the eastern corridor, on his way to the school-room—and then she sat and listened long—a wicked satisfaction gradually filling her heart. There was no sound of his returning steps!

She arose and softly passed from Lady de Crespigny's sitting-room, where she had remained, and passed noiselessly to her own apartment in the opposite corridor.

All was silent there, but the door of the school-room was ajar, and from it appeared a dim light. Towards it the Italian glided; and imagining from the extreme stillness, that no one was there, she looked in, then she saw her mistake, and beheld the sleeping Claud.

If the expression of the girl's countenance could have been seen as she stood bending eagerly forward, her fierce eyes glaring on the sleeping object of her hatred with the expression of a tigress, the sight might have well had the power of directing the thoughts to those tales of horrors, which, not only fiction and romance, but truthful history has furnished. To have seen her thus, a beholder might have trembled with the expectation of seeing the glittering blade drawn forth, and plunged by a revengeful woman's hand, into the heart of him, who had despised her love, and turned that love into deadly hate.

But no, Nice's thoughts were not of blood !

The assassin's knife is not the weapon by which people wound those whom they would fain destroy in these our days. And there is now, no need to fly and hide themselves

after the injury has been inflicted, for the world aids and abets *such* vengeance.

"The world a willing stander-by,
Inclines to aid a specious lie."

Delicious revenge may yet be inflicted on a victim, for from the innocent—the honorable, may be taken, that which to guard in safety and respect, they would have gladly bared their bosoms to the murderous steel.

We have no need to go far back in the annals of our own social history, to prove the truth of this assertion. We have, in our own days, seen the pure and innocent fade and die, from the pestilential breath of calumny and slander.

Nice stood gazing, for a few moments, and then glided out of the apartment and stole softly to the door of the corridor—

"Her heart was full of blackest thoughts."

The door opened by an old-fashioned latch, but there was also a key inside—this she drew out. For a moment she trembled, and a guilty pallor overspread her countenance—but, should *she* turn coward, now the game was in her hand? No; she had even softly opened the door of Francesca's apartment, and held her guilty breath to listen to the soft breathing, which told her that the young creature slept. She entered; and again, in another moment, glided from the room, having perfected that which was to complete the wicked snare.

With the stealthy tread of conscious guilt, Nice again entered her own apartment.

Soon she heard the door of the corridor attempted from without; and then, some unsuccessful efforts were made to open it. She heard Francesca's maid say to some one passing—

“ Why, who can have locked this door?”

Then the woman knocked several times and hearing nothing, added—

" Well, this is very strange! I was to have slept in my mistress's dressing-room ; but she must have gone to sleep long ago, and will never be much the wiser; so I may as well go to my own bed; but I should like to know who has taken the liberty of locking this door."

The retreating steps of Jane and her companion were then immediately heard.

It was considerably past midnight, when Claud might have been seen pacing up and down the corridor, with the impatient steps with which a young lion walks the cage in which he is confined. But it was not only the confinement which chafed his spirit. He had been rendered suspicious of late, and now entertained some misgivings of design and treachery.

After sleeping some time, he had awakened with a start, and surprised by the lateness of the hour, prepared immediately to quit

the corridor, and found his egress impeded. The first impulse of his surprise, was to shake the door with violence; but then, remembering his near vicinity to Francesca, he desisted, from the fear of disturbing her by such a fruitless noise, and his only alternative was to walk to and fro, considering what step it would be most expedient to take.

At length, after much deliberation, he rang a loud peal at the school-room bell, and soon after he heard steps and voices without.

"Who is that?" he cried, in a suppressed, but impatient tone. "Some one has been so unaccountably impertinent, as to lock this door; open it immediately."

"It is fastened inside, sir," said the voice, which he recognised as that of his own servant who had been sitting up for his master, "the key is not without."

"Where the devil then is it?" cried Claud out of all patience to speak in the mildest

term, at the ridiculous situation in which he was placed.

"The key is not here," he continued. "Who sleeps in this corridor besides Mrs. Vavasour?" and he now heard the whispering of female voices, one of which answered, "La Signora Nice!"

"Claud then ordered that the door should be immediately forced, as he would not disturb that lady, who alone could have the key, as Mrs. Vavasour had long since retired to rest.

These orders were soon executed. The door was opened, and Mr. Hamilton stood with a countenance he could not entirely free from embarrassment at his disagreeable position, amongst the little group, who had collected, and which consisted of, besides his own servant, Francesca's maid, the Italian Martucchia, and one or two others who skulked out of the gallery as he appeared; every countenance wearing a look of mysterious consciousness which could not be concealed.

But amidst the assemblage there was one tall figure, looking more than ever stiff and austere from having been disturbed at this unseemly hour, and from the evidently perturbed state of her mind. To her Claud advanced and gave the explanation of the whole affair, in a tone which could be heard, and was listened to by all the others.

Mrs. Rivers received the recital in solemn silence, her severe eyes fixed in mournful gravity on his face ; and when he had concluded, she said, in a decided tone, that the affair should be thoroughly investigated in the morning, and the gallery was soon restored to quiet and vacuity.

It is a painful task to have to record the circumstances which closely followed this unfortunate night. To relate the triumphs of the wicked over the good and innocent, even for the briefest space, is repugnant to the feelings ; it is like seeing the poor dove over-

powered by the talons of the hawk, its pure silvery plumage, tarnished and defaced, but

“ Blest are they
Whose sorrow rather is to suffer wrong
Than to do wrong.”

The next morning the events of the night were spread through the whole household. Nice had early sought the sleeping-room of her friend. She related to her the details as she had received them from Martuccia, pretending to have been awakened by the disturbance, and having enquired into the meaning.

But Giulia had heard it also. No sleep had visited her eyes, and Nice saw in a glance at her wretched countenance, that it needed but little exertion on her part, to heighten the dark suspicions which were crowding into her distempered mind.

And Francesca, when her maid entered her room the next morning, to draw back the cur-

tains, she started up and asked if some extraordinary noise had not been heard in the corridor last night; she said it sounded like a door being broken open.

The maid cleared her voice, and with a mysterious expression of countenance was preparing to speak, when Mrs. Rivers entered, and to the old lady Francesca directed her enquiries—her curiosity being now much excited by the manner of the maid, whose eyes were fixed upon the innocent, astonished countenance of her young mistress. Mrs. Rivers detailed all that had occurred. Francesca did indeed think that it was a strange, mysterious affair.

She arose, and after having performed her toilette, repaired to her sitting-room. Immediately after, she heard Mrs. Rivers, accompanied by two housemaids, walking about the other rooms of the corridor in search of the missing key, and lastly, they entered her own bed-chamber. She stood at the door of the school-room rather interested in the business.

In a few moments she heard an exclamation, followed by a dead silence. Mrs. Rivers then issued from the apartment pale as death. In her trembling hands she held the key!

Francesca saw her approach the door of the corridor, and place it in the lock. She followed her.

"Have you found it, Mrs. Rivers?" she cried, "and in my room—impossible—how could the key have got there?"

"Heaven only knows, young lady, and may Heaven declare who did the deed," was Mrs. Rivers reply, in a tone and with a look so awfully solemn, that Francesca shrunk back pale and startled, staring at the old woman with her large astonished eyes.

Mrs. Rivers passed on. She went through the gallery down the western corridor, and entered the Baroness's sitting-room.

It was occupied by Claud, Giulia, and Nice. Giulia was seated, her hands clasped together, her eyes wildly dilated—her cheeks pale as

death—writhing as if in some agonising suspense. Her friend stood by her side—a look of fierce defiance was on her countenance.

Claud was at a little distance, an expression of calm but deep determination on his face.

All eyes turned at once to the opening door in eager expectation.

Slowly, and with a funeral expression, Mrs. Rivers stalked in amongst them. She laid the key upon the table, but she did not speak; she only fixed her eyes with a sad intense look of enquiry on Claud.

“Well, Mrs. Rivers, where was it found?” he enquired.

“It was found,” she replied, in a sepulchral tone, “in Mrs Vavasour’s room. But let not,” she continued, turning her eyes upon Lady de Crespigny, “oh, let not appearances cause the innocent to suffer wrong!”

“The innocent!” cried the voice of the Italian girl, with a laughing sneer, whilst with a groan of agony the wretched Giulia sank down upon the ground.

Claud approached her. He lifted her up in his arms and at the same time turning round to the Italian girl, he said, in a loud tone of indignant anger,

" Let the person in this house who dares to assert his, or her belief in so gross, so villainous a slander leave it this instant! Such persons shall pollute it no longer with their presence—and you, Giulia," he added, for he saw she had not fainted; it was but the stunning apathy of wretchedness, " look up, and declare your utter rejection of such a vile insinuation, as well as further companionship with that wretch, who has poisoned your ear to receive it. Speak, Giulia, or by Heaven I will leave you for ever—never to return!"

" Yes, Lady de Crespigny," said the Italian girl, fixing her dreadful eyes upon the countenance of the unhappy Giulia—" let this moment seal your fate. Decide between your faithful friend, and your *faithful husband!*"

Nice laid a bitter emphasis on the two last

words—and Giulia tore herself from her husband's arms.

It was a dreadful scene, and there was that expression in the countenance and demeanour of Giulia, which, in a cooler and less agitated state, might have excited in the kind heart of Claud more of compassionate alarm than of resentment, but himself goaded almost to madness by this terrible acme of all he had been made to endure from her—or rather from the hated viper, which she had allowed so pertinaciously to cling to her, the dreadful thought that suspicion had now, by the wicked creature's treachery, something tangible to lay hold of, and that the innocent Francesca, whom he had promised her husband to protect and watch over, should suffer from the dread imputation, all this was more than he was able to endure. For himself he could laugh in scorn at the base assault, but for the young, pure, child-like wife, he felt that its very breath was injury and pollution.

"Then farewell, Giulia," he exclaimed.
"Mrs. Rivers, I am going to send protection
for Mrs. Vavasour --till that arrives, she must
remain in the pestilential atmosphere of this
house — to your care I commend her—see
that she is well cared for---on your peril!"

Claud turned away; he was in the gallery,
when a suppressed cry smote on his ears issuing
from the apartment he had just quitted.

CHAPTER XIV.

Oh God defend me! how am I beset!
What kind of catechising call you this?

Browbeating her fair name,
And troubling her sweet pride.

CLAUD was passing through the gallery with hurried steps.

The carriage had been ready early, and was now at the door. His progress was arrested by a low, timid voice. He looked up, it was

Francesca. Pale and trembling she stood before him.

" Claud," she exclaimed, " what is all this? —oh, tell me, I pray you. There is something in which I am concerned, and why did I hear that fearful shriek from Giulia? Oh, Claud, stop—do not turn away—tell me at once---for all this terrifies me."

" Not now, Francesca!" he replied in a faltering voice, turning away his head, " do not ask me; but you shall not remain here much longer, I am going to send my father down as soon as I arrive in London — in the meantime I advise you to go to the Seymours. But now I must go—God bless you, Francesca," and he wrung her hand and endeavoured to pass on, but she still detained him.

" No," she cried in a tone of deep distress, " I cannot be left alone with those, who, without any cause, are my enemies—yes even my own sister—why—why—does she shun my presence as if I were something vile; for it is

too evident by her conduct that I have unconsciously incurred her hatred, and to-day—even the servants look on me, and speak to me with dark mysterious countenances. Oh Claud I can endure this no longer—if you forsake me I shall die—take me with you to some one who will love me, and be kind to me till Ernest returns—dear Ernest! what would he say to see his Francesca miserable—take me I beseech you, to your dear, kind father; here I cannot—I *will not* stay. Ernest even could not wish it."

She spoke all this very rapidly, and in the agitation and excitement into which she had worked herself as she proceeded, she knelt before Claud seizing his hand with both of hers, and thus, with imploring looks and streaming eyes, made her eager supplication.

Claud, affected almost to agony, knew not what to do, but he heard footsteps advancing, and he knew that Francesca must not be seen in this position. He tore away his hand

stepped hastily back, and in a voice of almost stern command said :—

“ Francesca, rise this instant ; you cannot, under the present circumstances, go with me—it would never do. You must not be seen thus,” he continued in much agitation, as the poor young creature still continued to kneel with her hands clasped in supplication.

She was on her feet in an instant—there was something in his words, which made the blood rush to her cheeks, and she stood gazing at Claud with wild, affrighted surprise.

“ Forgive me, dearest Francesca,” he now said, noting her changed expression, “ but you know not half the wickedness which surrounds you—you little imagine, how even innocence, and honor, can be maligned. Yes,” he cried, losing in his turn all command over himself, overcome by his strong emotion as he grasped her little, trembling hand—“ but you will bear witness, that never by word or deed---and God who sees my heart, knows that even in thought

Claud Hamilton has never for a moment wronged your husband, Francesca—that husband who gave you so confidingly to my care! The love I have felt for you, has been that which I would have experienced towards a pure angel-like sister; let them dare say one word injurious of that sister, and they shall feel the effects of wrath and vengeance, such as never before fell upon the vile slanderer's head."

It was now Francesca who turned her head from him; she had shrunk back, and the blood which on the first dawning of a dreadful thought had rushed to her neck and face, with a violence with which it had never visited them before, faded away, and left her pale as death, an expression of the greatest horror pervading her countenance.

"Mr. Hamilton, why do you not go away?" said the voice of Mrs. Rivers, in tones, which her evident emotion deprived of the sternness with which she would fain have spoken the words.

"For the sake of decency, sir, depart immediately; after what has occurred this scene is most improper—go, sir, pray," and she placed herself before Francesca as if to prevent his again approaching her. Claud, commanding her once more in a choked voice of agitation to the care of the only person he trusted in that house, departed, and Mrs. Rivers turned and looked upon Francesca. There she still stood, stunned—petrified, but the old woman seizing her arm with a stern, firm grasp, led her before the likeness of her whose sad history she had once related to the young wife.

"Mrs. Vavasour, look at that picture," she said in a voice of awful solemnity, "and if with the same feeling of abhorrence and shame, you can think of the crime of her, whom it pourtrays, as when you first heard the story from my lips—if your tears have still only cause to fall, for an erring sister's sin, and you can call God solemnly to witness, that in thought, word, and deed, you are innocent of

any feeling approaching to her transgression—then wait in patience, place your cause in *His* hands, who never suffers the innocent to be confounded."

"*If—if I am innocent,*" cried the poor young creature in a voice of agony, clasping her hands in wild misery about her head—"and *I am to be placed before this picture to answer that question;* and the time is come when *I am to be asked if I am innocent--and of what--oh ! horrible—horrible !—it is enough—let me die.*"

Francesca threw herself upon the ground covered her face, and groaned aloud—it was shame enough even to be suspected.

"Signora Vavasour, this lowly penitence befits you, but in the privacy of your chamber it would be more seemly, that it should be poured forth; unless it is your desire to do penance publicly for the misery you have brought upon this house."

Francesca started up. She stood before her

infamous traducer, no longer shrinking over-powered beneath the blighting influence which for a time had laid her low, but firm in all the terrible majesty of woman's insulted pride and injured innocence.

Even the bold, hardened, Italian stepped backwards, and seemed to dwindle from her usual haughty, towering height, when confronted by that slender form, now as if transformed into a young Pythoness. Francesca shook back fiercely the showers of jetty hair, which had fallen around her face and neck. Her delicate nostrils dilated--her eyes flashed as with living fire,

"Ah!" she cried lifting up her clenched hands, "it is you then, who, to add to all the ruined happiness your wickedness has wrought, dares to pour forth your poison, not only upon the honorable name of him who has tolerated your presence beneath his roof—but also upon *me*—*you* presume to talk to *me* of bringing misery upon this house—to *me* of doing pen-

ance for crime. Wretch, stand back, and let me go to my sister, and then I will quit this house for ever."

Francesca advanced as if to enter the corridor.

"What, you will prevent me?" she cried--"Well so be it," and she turned to leave the gallery.

"Stop Signora," cried Nice, in a cold, sneering tone, for she had recovered from her momentary discomposure. --"Now that your impotent rage has in a measure subsided, I may do my mission. In spite of the misery and ruin you have brought upon your sister, by your treachery and ingratitude, she, in compassion to your extreme youth, will not permit you to quit her protection, until she has committed you into the hands of your husband or into those of some one whom he may appoint to receive you--add not then to the other proofs of your guilt by attempting to fly. However the attempt now would be fruit-

less. Be grateful for your sister's generous consideration, and do not presume to insult her by forcing your presence upon her. Keep to your apartments ; you will have those to attend upon you who will prove better guardians, than the persons who have hitherto pretended to fulfil that office," and the Italian glanced towards Mrs. Rivers.

Opening the door of the eastern corridor she held it, with a sign to Francesca to pass through.

"Mrs. Rivers," Francesca said with the dignity of a captive Queen who yields herself to a treacherous subject, "I will remain in this house, until Mr. Hamilton, my guardian arrives ; when once under his protection none can then prevent me from leaving it—let me see Mr. Seymour when he arrives to-morrow, and send over as usual for tidings of my child."

"She went her way with a strong step and slow,
Her pressed lip arched—and her clear eye undimmed,
As it had been a diamond, and her form
Borne proudly up, as if her heart breathed through."

And all that long day her proud spirit bore her up. She attempted not to leave the corridor, but kept entirely to her own apartments.

"Where is Thomas?" Francesca enquired, when her dinner was brought up by Martuccia.

"Thomas was out of the way, Signora," answered the woman, "and I was ordered to attend upon you."

"And Mrs. Rivers—why do I not see her?"

"She is ill," said Martuccia.

In the evening she came again to inform Mrs. Vavasour that a message had been brought from the vicarage, to say that the child was very well.

The poor captive then existed on the hope of the morrow—the comforting expectation of seeing Mr. Seymour.

The morrow came. Her own maid attended her toilette. She had been but a short time in Mrs. Vavasour's service. Francesca could

not help remarking that she looked sullen and suspicious.

Service was only performed once in the chapel, morning and afternoon alternately. This day it was to be in the afternoon. For several Sundays Lady de Crespigny had not appeared amongst the congregation. Claud, Francesca, and Mrs. Rivers had alone joined the servants. On this occasion none of the family were present. Francesca did not make an attempt to attend the service, for on hearing from a note that was brought to her from Gertrude, that Mr. Seymour was prevented from attending, and was obliged to send his curate in his place, the poor young creature's spirit sunk. It seemed as if all things conspired against her. And again the vague suggestions which had forced themselves upon her mind, for she was far from guessing all the dreadful extent of that of which she was accused, overpowered her heart, with fear and trembling.

She tried to write to Mrs. Seymour, in answer to her note, in which she expressed her surprise that Francesca had not come to see her child the day before. Gertrude said he was grown fat and healthy since he had left the bewitched air of Shirley Hall.

But poor Francesca scarcely knew how to write, for she fell a shrinking repugnance to detail upon paper the dark mysteries surrounding her, and a feeling of pride restrained her from complaining of the situation in which she was placed. She merely wrote that she had much just now to make her very uncomfortable, that she would come to the vicarage the next day if she possibly could—but if she were prevented, she trusted Mr. Seymour would come over to Shirley to see her.

She wrote also to her aunt, but even to her she was guarded. She knew Mrs. Gordon could not leave her dying friend, and expecting the arrival of Mr. Hamilton in a few days which would free her from all her troubles,

Francesca judged it more prudent to wait till they had all passed, before she detailed to her tender friend the wretched treatment to which her departure had exposed the cherished object of her affection.

The young are easily diverted from dejection by any little exertion or excitement, and even the employment of writing aroused Francesca from the languor of sorrow into which she had been sinking.

The maid was dismissed when she came to offer her services, for her unpleasant manner had rendered her presence disagreeable to her young mistress. Mrs. Rivers, she reported, as still confined to her bed by illness.

Francesca was left alone with a calm though pensive serenity on her countenance — how changed the following morning

CHAPTER XV.

"

" I must not disesteem
My rightful cause for being thus accused, nor must
Forsake myself, tho' I were rest of all
Fear cannot make my innocence unjust,
Unto itself, to give my truth the fall."

DANIEL.

THE same day on which Claud Hamilton had departed from Shirley, fresh food for comment, and mysterious whispers, had been afforded to the household, by the appearance

of a tall, dark stranger, recognized by the few domestics who had been at the hall some years ago as the Italian Priest — who had then created so great a sensation in that same place, and left an impression on the minds of many which had never been effaced; and it was only a few days before, that one of these same individuals, strolling in the yard late one night, had declared on his return, that he had either seen a ghost pass close to him as he stood near the door of the chapel leading into the shrubbery, or the priest himself.

However, he had now no need to play the part of a tolerated guest. He appeared in his acknowledged office, for so was it soon published throughout the house, as the confessor and spiritual adviser of the Baronee de Crespigny, it thus being made evident, that their young lady had become a convert to the religion he professed.

Poor Mrs. Rivers! this was, indeed, a blow

which fell heavily on her shattered nerves, and had, in reality, brought on an attack to which she had been subject of late—for she was becoming very old—and compelled her, much against her inclination to keep her bed.

Of this new arrival, Francesca alone was ignorant; how then, she must have been startled, when, at a somewhat late hour—for she had felt very little inclination to seek her bed—a low knock sounded at her door, which immediately after was slowly opened, and the awful figure of the priest stood within the chamber, his glittering eyes fixed upon her.

Francesca's first impulse on seeing this unexpected appearance, was to cover her face with her hands—a shriek of terror escaping her lips.

"Signora, there is no occasion for this alarm. I am Fra Paolo—do not you remember me?" enquired the priest.

"What do you want with me?" exclaimed Francesca, uncovering her eyes, but shrinking back as he approached nearer—the frightened girl gazing with mistrustful terror upon him.

"Compose yourself, Signora, and you shall hear," and the priest seated himself before her. "I come on a work of awful import. I am here to set before you this night, that, which upon your decision, will fix, not only your fate on earth—but your eternal doom in Heaven.

"Daughter, when last you saw me within these walls, you were a heedless child—too unstable for one to attempt to draw from the web of heresy which was weaving around you. I return, and find you a wedded wife—but alas! accused of a crime, heinous in the sight of God and man. I come to propose to lead you to seek the aid of that religion, which secures absolution for sin in the sight of Heaven. It is truly, daughter, an offer of vital importance

to you—for on your acceptance of it, depends also, your honor or dishonor, in the sight of your fellow creatures."

Francesca was mute with horror and surprise.

"Your sister has, my daughter, returned to the bosom of the Mother Church. Again have I washed away, by the holy waters of baptism, the contaminating stains of heresy, with which she had been polluted. For your soul's salvation we also yearn; and here, I offer it to you, upon those same terms—and though you may have erred, all may yet be well."

"Tell me," said Francesca, now trembling more with indignant surprise than womanly terror; "what is the grievous crime, of which *you* now, also rise up to accuse me. Tell me, how have I erred, that apostacy from the religion of my Saviour, can alone purchase my honor in the sight of man—Answer me this," she

cried, with proud defiance, "ere I can give my reply."

The priest gazed upon the young being before him.

He had entered her presence with a full belief, that it was a weak, erring woman, with whom no fixed principles of religion could have any great weight, with whom he had to deal--who would, without much scruple, renounce her Protestant faith, in exchange for having her shame and misdemeanour hushed up--and thus he had, with haughty confidence, made sure of the honor and glory of laying at the feet of the Pope, the open profession of both members of the noble House of de Crespigny, converts to his zeal in the great cause. Sin was no new, or startling sound to Fra Paolo's ear--well accustomed was the priest, in the confessions on the Continent, to listen to crimes of every kind and degree from both sexes. There was but

one mortal sin in his eyes — and that was heresy! On a convert from that deadly transgression, however otherwise sinful, he would gladly pour the healing oil of absolution over every other fleshly back sliding.

The cold blooded priest had looked upon one so young and innocent in appearance, and even in his hard mind a doubt had arisen that guilt, such as had been imputed to her, could really have been committed—hypocritical, underhand sin! His *metier* of confessor had made him a skilful delineator of countenances, and as in the majesty of innocence she thus addressed him, he began to suspect that to effect his purpose, his only plan was to continue to connive at the falsehood and fraud which his artful niece had contrived, in order to place the victim in his power.

“ Well so it must be!” he mentally exclaimed. And what are such trifles— the immolation of a wretched woman— the destruction of domestic happiness to the Jesuit who has sworn--

" To know nor right nor wrong nor crime nor virtue,
But as subservient to Rome's cause."

" Daughter," he said, " of the sin you are accused, I imagined you were well aware," and he fixed his fearful eyes, so like those of Nice, keenly upon Francesca, " Strange profession of ignorance truly, of all that so vitally concerns you ! This dissimulation—pardon me for so saying—will in no way assist your cause. I judge not, but I will only lay before you all that I have heard."

And from the unsparing lips of the priest, did his innocent listener, for the first time, fully comprehend, in all its enormity, the nature of the dark cloud which was blackening around her. The poor young creature sat at first staring with her large eyes as if turned to lead—her whole form to marble ; her breath seemed suspended, and then the priest whispered softly in her ear :—

" Now listen to me my daughter ; declare yourself once more a member of the Mother

Church, and again within its holy pale, however deep may be your guilt, you shall receive free absolution in the sight of Heaven—this I can promise you, and—”

“ *You* promise, and who are *you* who presume to do so ?” interrupted Francesca indignantly, “ and what can your Church offer, to expiate a sin of so foul a die, as that of which you accuse me? Can the blood of saints—whole ages of penitence, blot out the stain from the soul, which is polluted by such a deed of wickedness? No ! were I the guilty thing you fain would make me, I could but lie down at *His* feet, who died for the vilest sinner, and in *Him* alone dare hope for mercy. No ! proud priest, you cannot draw me from that religion, in which the only true atonement for sin¹ is offered to the penitent, and God, who knows, that though a weak, sinful creature, I am innocent of this great offence, will, in His good time, confound the malice of those who have risen up to destroy me. Those who love

her will despise the gross falsehood uttered against Francesca Vavasour."

"You are prepared then," said the priest, "to brave the perilous breeze of scandal—to hear the name of which you speak so proudly, sent forth into the world, tarnished by the breath of suspicion, and you will trust alone to the assistance of Heaven, the love of friends, to clear it from the pollution. Well, be it so—Lady, the hour of trial is near at hand. Ere many days the fair name of Francesca Vavasour, will be carried by the "eagle wings of scandal," around this scandal loving world, sport for the idle--shame to the virtuous; for to be *suspected*, is to the virtuous, guilt. The whisper will go round, that a fair young wife was left by her gallant husband, beneath her sister's roof, that from the period of her domestication amongst them, the affection of that sister's *husband* was alienated from his wife; that circumstances which have often proved sufficient, to brand a fair name, rendered her suspected in the eyes of the whole house-

hold, and has ruined her sister's happiness for ever. This will be the news to greet her husband's ears, when, hastening from the fatigues and perils of war, he returns to the wife he left pure and unsullied, by a breath---"

The priest was interrupted by a shriek, which rang wildly through the apartment from the lips of his wretched listener.

The proud indignation which had awakened her from the trance of dismay, into which she had at first been thrown, had again gradually died away, as the priest uttered these terrible words, and again the blood vanished from her cheek, her form contracted into rigidity, as she stood before him, her pale lips parted with gasping horror.

"No, no, no," she cried, throwing herself upon her knees, and clasping her hands, "he must not hear this--it would kill him--oh ! you are a man--you are a priest of God--let them not wound his proud, his noble heart so cruelly ! I am innocent--by all my hopes of

Heaven I am innocent; why should such wicked, slanderous tales be spread about the world? Oh! stop them—stop them—as you are a man—a christian!"

"There is one way, lady, of which I have told you, of stifling the whispers which have as yet not passed farther than this house, and that it is yet in my power to do—I have that influence over your sister, which can even soothe the agony of her suspicions, and perhaps reconcile her to her husband. This at once would silence every suspicion, and I will prevent the secret communication with the press, of which the certain consequence would be, the insertion of a paragraph in the public prints, and then, even if afterwards the affair were hushed up, it must for ever cast a cloud upon your name, which will pass even to your child and to your husband! But you will not," he added more mildly, as at the last words he saw Francesca start and quiver as if a dagger had pierced her heart, "you will not allow this to be, my dear daughter. The honour of your name—the peace—the

love of your husband is at stake ; for remember," and he seized her arm, "the great Roman General said, 'Cæsar's wife must not even be suspected,' *and put her from him.*" A cry of agony again burst from Francesca's lips, and she clasped the hard hearted priest's knees and cried aloud,—

" Oh ! say not so, in pity say not so."

" And will you endure all this misery and shame," continued Fra Paolo, "obstinately to hold fast a religion, false and heretical, as shall soon be proved to you when once your eyes are opened to the truth, and you have returned to the faith of the Mother you once loved—Daughter, consent to become a member of the Church of Rome, and all shall be well with you both in this life, and that which is to come."

" What !" cried Francesca, with a wild, despairing look ; " the religion of my husband, that in which my dear aunt has nurtured me, and which I so love and vene-

rate ; to forsake it, would be guilt as great as —— Oh ! merciful God, help me !”

“ Decide, daughter, between honor and dishonor — a fair or a blighted name. I stretch no further my hand, to save a hardened heretic.”

“ Then Heaven be my support,” she cried, in faltering accents ; “ for come what may, never will I renounce my religion.”

And the wretched girl sunk prostrate on the ground.

The priest raised her in his arms, for he saw that she had fainted. He laid her on the sofa —gazed for a moment with an unpitying eye on her death-like face, and left the room—having rang the bell for assistance.

CHAPTER XVI.

These are the results
Of luckless unblest deeds; they are the fruits
Of your contrivance.

SHAKESPEARE.

And thou art the cause of this anguish—my mother!
SONG.

Never, perhaps, was a journey performed in a more miserable state of mind, than that of Cland Hamilton, as he proceeded with the utmost speed to London.

It was not till the next morning that he arrived in Portman Square—worn out in mind and body.

He hastily enquired of the old servant who admitted him, whether his father and mother were up. The man looked with alarm upon the altered countenance of his formerly joyous young master, and told him that Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, with Lord and Lady Beverley, had gone the day before to Paris.

“To Paris!” exclaimed Claud in dismay.

“Yes, sir, my master was suddenly entrusted with some official business to —— and the ladies thought it would be a pleasant trip to accompany him—but I hope that her ladyship is well—that all is right at the hall?”

“Right!” thought Claud bitterly, “pretty well,” he said hastily, “but I wished most particularly to see my father—it is very provoking,” and he proceeded to the apartment into which he was ushered in this deserted house, for all the children had gone, he learnt, to

Lord Beverley's villa in the neighbourhood. That day, in spite of himself, Claud was so ill from all that he had gone through, that he was obliged to give up the idea of proceeding to follow his parents. In the morning however he departed to Dover, and there he was detained by a contrary wind till the next evening, so that it was not till four days after leaving London that he arrived in Paris. The Allies were now in full possession of that city, a general amnesty having been signed between the Foreign powers and the French.

Joyful was the exclamation of surprise, which burst from the lips of Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, when they beheld their son enter suddenly the apartment; though as quickly did their feelings of delight change to alarm and distress, when they perceived from the wan, anxious countenance of their most beloved son, that it was no trip of pleasure which had induced him to join them, but some matter of grave and painful import.

"Have you seen Vavasour?" were his first words, after the greeting was over.

Mr. Hamilton had seen him a day or two ago, but he was so occupied with his military duties that it was but for a few minutes, and they had not met him since. He had enquired anxiously what had been their last news from Shirley, and had said somewhat gravely, that he had received a letter from Mrs. Gordon, which had made him more than ever desirous of getting to England which he trusted he might be able to manage merely to bring back Francesca with him.

"God grant that he may do so," cried Claud, "I must lose no time in seeking him." And then to his anxious parents' ears, with deep and bitter indignation, he related the history of the wrongs which, under his own roof, he had been made to endure—the dreadful and disgraceful crisis to which matters had at length arrived—the base suspicions in which not only himself but the innocent Francesca were in-

volved—the villainous snares which had been laid, to blast their reputation in the sight of his wife and the whole household.

With the greatest indignation the father and mother listened to this recital. They could scarcely imagine one malicious spirit, having the power to create such mischief and misery between the husband and wife; for Claud declared that after what had happened, and the months of wretchedness he had endured, nothing now would ever induce him to live with Giulia again—they had parted for ever!

Mrs. Hamilton saw her favorite son depart in search of Colonel Vavasour, and as she looked after him as he walked towards the door, then turned his countenance upon her, and with a wan smile upon his nervous, quivering lips, nodded to her and said, he would soon be back again, the mother's heart smote within her; she wept bitterly.

Her son—her beloved Claud—her pride!

and this then was his fate--her noble, generous son--and meddling thought suggested itself--*her sacrificed son!* In the hour of sorrow how bitterly often does retrospection add to the misery of the moment; self-reproach the torture which already is hard enough to bear.

It was with agony that Mrs. Hamilton now remembered all the part she had taken to force the marriage upon poor Claud; all she had said--the arguments she had used to work upon his affectionate and sensitive feelings--how she had laboured to bring about the union, shutting her eyes resolutely to every consideration, save those of worldly advantages. Oh! it was a bitter, painful thought to the really tender mother, and the usual suggestion at which the conscience is in general so glad to grasp, "that it was all done for the best," failed now to afford the slightest consolation. She was full of bitter--heartfelt--self-reproach.

"Oh yes, my dearest George," she sobbed, in answer to some consoling words from her husband, who endeavoured to calm the extreme agitation of his much loved wife—"It is very kind of you to speak thus—but it is only right that I should suffer—I thoroughly deserve it—and the bitter repentance I now feel, is only what I ought to endure, for my selfish, worldly conduct towards poor Claud. It is I, who have destroyed his happiness, I who led him, with my eyes wide open, into the snare. Giulia was never formed to make him happy, and I knew it, and yet—"

She stopped abruptly, and leant her head upon her hand, and mused in dejected silence for some minutes.

"Yes," she continued, as if uttering her thoughts aloud, "it is indeed well, that I should suffer thus, and may it profit me in my future conduct towards those children, whom I have still to guide, in their first entrance into the world. The fate of the three elder ones ought, at

least, to teach me, not to be, as hitherto, over anxious, but to leave the others with more confidence in the hands of an all wise Providence. It is a warning to me not to strive in my own strength, which indeed has proved to be but very weakness, and it tells me to bless the mercy, which has guarded two of my children in safety, from my unfortunate influence ; Annie and Gertrude ! both so happy in their different spheres, and whose happiness was not in any way secured by any act on the part of their mother ! ”

“ Truly,” Mrs. Hamilton sorrowfully added, “ it is a stern lesson, this miserable end of dear Claud’s brilliant marriage, and may it teach my worldly heart to yearn after better things than mere rank and riches.”

Mr. Hamilton awaited with much anxiety Claud’s return, for although he was certain that Colonel Vavasour would treat the whole affair with the contempt it deserved, yet he felt it was a most delicate and disagreeable

subject to broach to a husband, and sincerely did he sympathise with his son.

But Claud soon returned with slow steps and a disappointed air.

The journey to Paris had proved fruitless. He learnt that Colonel Vavasour had left it the preceeding day, charged with military despatches. Nothing now remained for Claud but to follow him immediately to England, and he would have done so, even though his distressed mother, almost on her knees, implored him to take rest---for his blood-shot eyes, and pallid countenance surely indicated the havoc which excitement and distress of mind will make upon the stoutest heart---on the following morning he would have departed, but when he attempted to rise, bodily and mental fatigue had done their work, and an access of fever rendered him a prisoner to his bed.

Mr. Hamilton could not leave Paris at that moment. Claud was obliged therefore, for the present, to rest satisfied with a clear and ex-

plicit letter, written by his father to Colonel Vavasour, and which they strove to persuade the half distracted young man, must be perfectly satisfactory, if necessary at all; for ere he could receive it, Vavasour would have probably found Francesca with the Seymours, and from them he would have had a full account of all the unfortunate business.

With regard to Giulia, Mr. Hamilton hoped to be able to accompany his son to England very shortly, and then arrange matters for the future.

CHAPTER XVII.

" Oh ! there lie such depths of woe
In a young blighted spirit ! Manhood rears
A haughty brow, and age has done with tears
But youth bows down, to misery in amaze
At the dark cloud o'ermantling its fresh days,
And thus it was with her."

MRS. HERMAN.

" If there be but one spot upon thy name,
One eye thou fear'st to meet—one human voice,
Whose tones thou shrinkest from. Woman veil thy face,
And bow thy head—and die."

Ibid.

" The hag of hatred," seemed, indeed, to have triumphed, to judge by what was passing within the walls of Shirley Hall.

Not only was the poor victim, Giulia, that unfortunate being who had long been the slave of her bosom friend, and bosom sin—dark-eyed jealousy, her prey, but one, who till now, had walked beneath a summer sky, clothed in the panoply of innocence and love, was also bowed down like a blighted flower.

From the night when Francesca had been found by her attendant, stretched senseless on the sofa, the proud dignity with which she had, hitherto borne herself, had sunk into a deep, hopeless dejection. She scarcely heeded those who approached her. Even when Mrs. Rivers, like a risen ghost, sat by her side two days after, shocked and dismayed by the alteration in the appearance of the poor, young creature, the wandering, leaden expression of her large, sad eyes—her bloodless cheeks! and the good woman spoke kind, soothing words to her, Francesca shrunk, and turned away from her enquiries.

"She wanted nothing," she murmured; "yes,

indeed, one thing she did wish--to be removed into another apartment--out of that hated corridor--and nearer to Mrs. Rivers's apartment."

The old woman did not consider it necessary to consult others on this trifling step. She humoured the fancy of the poor sufferer, and soon Francesca found herself in a bed-chamber over-looking the court-yard.

"This was the chamber occupied by Colonel Vavasour, on his first visit to the Hall," Mrs. Rivers said, with the hope of arousing her to some signs of emotion, from the deep apathy which seemed to overwhelm her; and Francesca, who on her entrance, had sunk down on a seat in an attitude of despondency, on hearing these words, stooped down and kissed the ground with the reverential tenderness of one, who presses her lips on the tomb of a beloved departed.

The heart of the housekeeper bled at the sight--what could this state of mind portend?

her heart and feelings recoiled at the idea that it might be—

“ That shuddering chill
Which follows fast on deeds of ill.”

and those who knew and loved her less, in short, her enemies, might have triumphed in her altered state, which so greatly forwarded their fiendish designs, by its assuming the appearance of the late remorse of an erring one.

Mrs. Rivers strove to arouse her to some explanation—some outpouring of her secret anguish. She talked of her child, and asked whether she might send for it to cheer her—whether she would like to see Mr. and Mrs. Seymour.

“ My child! Oh, no!” she cried, and clasped her hands with a shudder; “ bring it not here to share in its mother’s disgrace; no, nor any one—they will have heard all—and I should die with shame. No, Mrs.

Rivers, let none approach me till *he* comes --- and then I will crawl to his feet, and there---"

"Disgrace---shame! And what has Mrs. Vavasour to do with disgrace or shame?" said Mrs. Rivers, sternly; "why, young lady, encourage the slander of your enemies by this deportment, fitted only—pardon me—for the guilty?"

"Guilty! Oh, no! not guilty," Francesca gasped, joining her hands with a deep, convulsive sigh.

Mrs. Rivers looked at her with a sad, enquiring gaze, and left her with the determination of seeking the advice and assistance of Mr. Seymour, whose benevolent countenance and sober deportment, had inspired her with respect and confidence---though, even to disclose to him, such disgraceful particulars, was deeply repugnant to her punctilious feelings of propriety.

Mrs. Rivers, however, began to make ar-

rangements, for being conveyed to the vicarage, but her purpose was soon frustrated. She was summoned to the library, where the Baroness was seated with her friend.

"Why do you wish to go to the vicarage?" said Lady de Crespigny, in a low, gloomy tone of voice, at the same time turning her lack lustre eyes upon the housekeeper as she stood before her.

"I am going to see Mr. Seymour, my lady," was the answer, in a firm voice.

The Baroness then looked round upon the Italian, as if to be instructed by her, how to proceed.

"Lady de Crespigny wishes you to know," said Nice, "that she considers it advisable, that Mrs. Vavasour should be kept in perfect seclusion, till the arrival of her husband, or some one appointed by him, to take charge of her, and can therefore, allow her to receive no visits. Lady de Crespigny, are not those your commands?"

Nice turned her eyes upon the Baroness, who murmured in a sullen tone --

"They are."

"And her Ladyship also desires," continued the Italian, "that at present, no exposure should be made of the disgraceful position of affairs; and it is Lady de Crespigny's further determination, that the person who takes upon herself to breathe a hint concerning it, to any one out of this house, or leaves the house for that purpose, shall return to it no more."

Poor Mrs. Rivers trembled so violently whilst listening to this speech, spoken in a tone of such insulting arrogance, that the words with which she would have replied, quivered on her lips, without the power of utterance, and she could only answer by a glance of indignation. It changed however to one of pity, when she looked on the Baroness, who turned away her head with a movement of impatience at the scrutiny of the faithful attached woman.

" You may go now," said the Italian haughtily, " and remember that Lady de Crespigny only suffers your attendance on her unfortunate sister to continue, as long as you do not interfere with *our* arrangements concerning her. If Mr. Seymour should call, he will be told that Mrs. Vavasour is not at present visible to any one. The child is in good hands— let it there remain." Mrs. Rivers withdrew with deep indignation and anguish at her heart.

Mr. Seymour did call that day at the Hall, and was denied access to Mrs. Vavasour; she could not see any one, he was told.

" Was she ill?" he enquired.

The servant believed not. " Might he speak to Mrs. Rivers?"—Mrs. Rivers was engaged. Mr. Seymour said he was sure that if his name were taken up he would be admitted. The footman then gave place to Martuccia who joined them at the door, and said that the Baroness was sorry that her own indisposition prevented her from receiving him, and that the elder Mr.

Hamilton was expected every day, and, till his arrival, Mrs. Vavasour could admit no visitors.

Mr. Seymour in astonishment and perplexity withdrew, to return home and talk over the mysteries of Shirley Hall with his wife. What could be going on there? It was very strange, but Mr. Hamilton's arrival must allay all anxiety on Francesca's account. It was impossible to force themselves into the house.

Both Gertrude and her husband were however uneasy and perplexed how to act, for they felt much for the poor young wife, thus immured within those gloomy walls. To the old nurse, who was beginning to wonder and fret at the long absence from her dear young mistress, they confided the result of Mr. Seymour's visit. The faithful creature immediately insisted upon returning to Shirley.

"My duty," she said, "is to be with her who I nursed from a child, and who I never

left before—Woe is me that I ever turned from her, even for that dear babe! The boy will be well cared for by the wet nurse, and you dear Madam, and I must go to my dear young lady."

The nurse departed without delay for Shirley Hall, and returned in the highest state of agitation and indignation. She had been literally turned from the house by the maid Martuccia, before she could see any one else, and refused all access to Mrs. Vavasour, the woman saying, that if she could not keep to her business of taking charge of the child, she was not wanted there—that Mrs. Vavasour had plenty of attendants, and if her services were required she would be sent for. The Seymours began to be seriously alarmed, and Gertrude wrote immediately to her father, informing him of all the circumstances; she entreated him to come without further delay; and thus matters continued for some days.

And the poor Francesca, how sudden had

been the veil of darkness which was cast over her spirit ! If her sorrow had expressed itself in words, it would have poured forth the Psalmist's plaint—

“ Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and a horrible dread has overwhelmed me. But, oh my God ! why hast thou forsaken me, why go I so heavily while my enemy oppresse?”

We know that there are hearts so susceptible, that even false insinuations prey upon their spirits and destroy their health—their peace—and even their life ; what marvel then that a young and delicate female scarcely conscious that there exists in the world such a thing as slander, should be overpowered beneath its crushing power, even silencing for a time the sustaining voice of conscious innocence. That a sin so monstrous should be cast upon her even by suspicion, was enough to scare her almost to madness.

To have the dearest feelings of her heart out-

and insulted—the devoted love of a wife, so pure, so sensitive, thus rudely breathed upon—to think that her proud name should be blackened by accusations so dreadful! What was she worth now to the husband who had loved her for the innocence—the purity, which he so much prized in a woman's nature?—At length so completely would her heart fail her, in the delirium of the wretched thoughts to which it was a prey—that the diseased fancy would conjure up dark suggestions even against herself. Had she been guilty unconsciously of some indiscretion which might in any way justify the malice of her enemies?, could it be possible that her love could have decreased even by an iota since her husband had left her? and then she would seize his picture and gaze upon it, till she felt truly by the gushing tenderness which swelled her heart to bursting, how slanderous against her love was even the bare idea. No, her fate would be to love on, however she might cease to be beloved—And now

she would rivet her eyes upon that pictured face, to catch the proud smile upon those lips---in that noble eye ; and it was with the feeling with which we look upon the expression, an artist has pourtrayed of a beloved one, whose look and smile we can never more behold.

Thus the weary time passed on with the wretched Francesca. She was not, however, left unmolested.

The priest paid a daily visit to her apartment. Far too zealous was he in his cause, to give it up from the circumstance of one unsuccessful attempt. He left no means untried to gain an influence over the mind of the young creature, but as fruitless were now his attempts, as when before he endeavoured to allure the gay butterfly child of other days. It was in vain he talked to her---she answered not---she scarcely heard his words. Passively she endured his presence like one who has no power to resist it, till one day--it was after Nice had intruded herself before Francesca--

in order to judge of the reality of the state in which she was reported to be — the priest, on repairing as usual to her room, found the door locked—and from that time, except to the voice of Mrs. Rivers, she opened it not. Concerning her child she scarcely spoke—sad proof of the state of mind to which lying tongues had reduced her!

CHAPTER XVIII.

" Tempests their furious course may sweep
Swiftly o'er the troubled deep,
Darkness may lend her gloomy aid,
And wrap the groaning world in shade ;
But man can show a darker hour
And bend beneath a stronger power ;—
There is a tempest of the soul,
A gloom where wilder billows roll !"

AMERICAN POET.

BUT to return to the unfortunate Giulia de Crespigny.

In her we see a picture of one of the most pitiable situations into which a human being

can be thrown ; for she had become the prey to a diseased mind—a state which withers, with its poisonous influence, every seed of natural feeling, turning with its jaundiced eye, light into darkness—good into evil—friends into enemies—enemies into friends ; not only the slave of its own weakness, but of the passions and evil designs of others.

Truly, of late, the unhappy Giulia had been exposed to trials which in their perplexing, nature were well calculated to bring to a climax, the irritation of her excited mind.

At the very moment when suspicion and jealousy were, by the insinuations of her bosom friend, eating their way into her very heart with all its torturing power, the Jesuit —by his niece advised that his hour was come—made his appearance, and without difficulty coiled his snares round the unfortunate victim.

With the same mystery with which he had once disappeared, Fra Paolo reappeared before the Baroness, and with awful solemnity pointed

out to her the woes he had prophesied, as inevitable, if again she yielded herself to the delusions of heresy, and which had in reality fallen upon her. He conjured her once more to turn in deep penitence to the Holy Church, and to strive by prayer and penance to deprecate the wrath she had drawn upon her head; thus her eternal happiness might be propitiated, although on earth it was forfeited to the just wrath of Heaven. Night after night he visited Lady de Crespigny by means of a secret staircase which led from the chapel. He effected this in secrecy, a key of that building having been secured by his niece, at the time when his escape had been connived at by her, and ever since preserved. From the house of a brother priest with whom he had taken up his abode, he would enter the chapel, ascend the worn out steps leading into the dilapidated confessional—which he hoped one day to see restored to its original use—and there stood before what he knew to be a door; which by a secret

spring admitted him to another winding stone staircase which led to a small oratory, cut out of the solid wall ; and drawing aside one of the small panels, Fra Paolo gained ingress to the sitting apartment of Lady de Crespigny.

No individual had been aware of this secret means of admittance save Mrs. Rivers; it was by that door her former unfortunate young mistress had contrived her guilty elopement, and therefore was looked upon by her with such deep horror that she had ever recoiled from allowing its existence to pass her lips. The late Lord de Crespigny, having heard of it when a boy, on his returning to Shirley, had ordered Mr. Rivers to make him acquainted with the situation of this secret communication ; Nice must therefore very early have exerted her power of seeing and hearing everything, and have gained some underhand knowledge upon the subject, which she afterwards put to such a profitable use, and which lately Mrs. Rivers had begun to suspect, as being the case.

The priest soon began to spend most of his time at Shirley Hall, and Claud's voluntary banishment, from his wife's sitting-room rendered this easy for him to contrive, without discovery, even during the day ; the little oratory affording him a rare hiding-place on accidental emergencies.

Soon the crafty man had completely won over the morbid imagination of the unhappy Giulia, to seek fancied solace in the rites and ordinances partaking of his religion. She was baptized on the day Claud departed---fasted---did penance, and authorized the priest to make the fact public, that she had embraced the Roman Catholic faith. But there must have been some misgivings in the minds of those, so triumphant in their machinations, on beholding their victim sinking into a state of mind which daily was becoming so startling, that they at length considered it expedient to keep her as much as possible from the observation of the household. In truth, those who had watched

the progress of the strong, overpowering passion evinced by Giulia towards Claud before her marriage—a passion which indeed had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength—

"The cherished madness of her heart."

and who had also witnessed the few fleeting months of ecstasy, which followed the realization of her hopes, now gazed with almost affright upon the change which their arts had created in her feelings. The love which she had so prized was changed into a cup of poison—a serpent at her heart! The love, which was to have changed the gloomy world into an abode of light and joy, was turned to utter darkness.

No wonder then, as by slow, but sure degrees, the insidious words of the Italian girl sunk deeper and deeper into the festering wound, which her own perfidious hand had inflicted—when the wretched wife imagined her husband's love was given to another, and that other her

own sister that her distempered mind began to view the affection, which for a brief space she fancied her husband bestowed upon her, as but a meteor which had lured her to destruction ; and, that the maddening mania which, from her childhood, had ever haunted her---the Cain-like passion---or, rather, unfortunate girl ! in her case, the infirmity of mind, which had ever made her look upon the innocent Francesca as her fated bane, destined to cross her path of happiness for ever—a mania, which, for her own base purposes, Nice had so artfully increased to the present point---no wonder that it should now have assumed a form nearly approaching to derangement.

Giulia would wander about the gloomy library like a dark spirit, well suited to be its inhabitant ; now seated in listless apathy, her eyes fixed upon some volume, she feigned to read---now starting up and awaking the solemn-toned organ, in strains which might well have exemplified some of those passions,

Collins has, with such a graphic hand,
described---

" Thy numbers. Jealousy, to nought were fixed,
Sad proof of thy distressful state !
And now it courted Love--now raving called on hate!"

or oftener still---

" With woeful measures wan despair—
Low sullen sounds her grief beguiled :
A solemn, strange, and mingled air--
"Twas sad by fits--by starts 'twas wild."

Thus the unfortunate Giulia would spend most of her day, scarcely opening her lips to her companions, Nice and the priest, who still remained to watch over the soul of his miserable convert.

It was the same day on which Fra Paolo had made his last unsuceessful visit to the door of Francesca's apartment, that he happened to be sitting alone with Lady de Crespiigny in the library, when suddenly the unusual sound of carriage wheels fell upon his ear, grinding up the approach.

The priest quitted the apartment in order to ascertain who the arrival was likely to prove, from an upper window, commanding a view along the avenue. He found his niece occupied in the same manner.

She turned her face towards him, on which was a look of fiendish determination, though her tightly compressed lips were blanched - seeing it was her uncle, she murmured—

“It is as it should be—it is he!”

“Who?” asked the priest.

“The injured husband,” she said, with a sneering laugh; “I recognise his servant.”

She glided away but paused as she passed before the room of Francesca, and gently drew the bolt, then passed through the passages down the stair-case leading into the hall, which she entered, just as the carriage drove into the court.

But she was not the only person who had repaired thither to receive the new arrival.

There, appeared, at the same time, the old housekeeper ; who, casting upon the Italian a stern, warning glance, which was returned by one of insolent defiance, with trembling hands undid the fastening of the door and threw it open.

The stately form of Francesca's husband stood before them.

CHAPTER XIX.

Oh, colder than the wind that freezes
Founts, that but now in sunshine played,
Is that congealing pang which seizes
The trusting bosom when betrayed.
He felt it—deeply felt it—and stood
As if the tale had frozen his blood,
So mute, and motionless was he ;
Like one whom sudden spells enchant.

LALLA ROOKH.

GENERAL Vavasour, for to that rank he had now proudly attained, by the gallant conduct, which was to be still further rewarded by a grateful sovereign who heaped such distinc-

tions and honors on the brave heroes of the Battle of Waterloo, had departed from the old hall — his noble heart subdued even to womanly weakness, by the bitter anguish of the parting from that fair young being, who had woven herself so closely round his affections, with an intensity of which, he had scarcely been aware till that hour. The soldier's spirit had, however' soon nerved to firmness the husband's heart, shaken by the soft murmurings of grief from woman's lips—the tears from woman's eyes—and warmed into god-like fire and strength, amidst the thundering cannon and the rage of battle—the memory of his love gleaming, like a soft star, upon the surrounding tumult.

Like hope's gay glance, from ocean's troubled foam.

But when it was all over—when he had done his part, and fresh laurels, stained with the blood of the vanquished foe, were wreathed

around his brow, how did his heart pant to escape like a bird to its nest—to the home, where there was one who so fondly watched for, prayed for his return. What to his heart were all the empty plaudits—the praise and honor of men! He panted to hear that sweet voice which would welcome him to her arms. It would have seemed passing strange to his companions in arms, had they seen the man, who, proud and unmoved, could stand all blandishments of pleasure and applause—all pangs of pain—all fears of danger, with his trembling eye dimmed by the tear of strong emotion—his changing cheek, and outstretched gaze of eager expectation, as he approached the dark, old mansion, which contained the light of his heart and life, where a new, and untasted joy too, awaited the soldier's return —the sight of a first born child!

Oh ! for a wing beyond the falcon's flight
To bear him like an arrow, to that height.

As his eager eye travelled rapidly over the building, his glance was riveted upon a window, where could be discerned a white figure, which the beating heart of the husband, told him, was her, who, the next moment, would be pressed within his arms ; yes, he could not, on a nearer approach mistake that form, which, with extended arms, remained visible to his strained, upward gaze, and which, just before the carriage reached the gate of the court, disappeared from his view — to fly, no doubt, to meet him. His impatience scarcely enabling him to wait till the carriage stopped, he wrenched open the door and sprang to the ground.

The door of the house slowly opened as he did so, and with what a countenance of expectation and ecstasy did his eyes glance around, scarcely noticing the two persons who received him, in their eager search for her whom he had expected to be the first to greet his longing sight.

What ! were there none but those two tall

figures in the hall? one rigidly solemn in her remembered character meeting, his enquiring gaze with trembling agitation, so strongly marked on her aged countenance that her faded quivering lips seemed unable to pronounce the words they would have uttered. And then the other--her countenance was composed certainly, but why that dark look of mystery? Like the bright flash through the thunder cloud there gleamed from it an expression the meaning, which he did not pause to analyse, but in that look was concentrated all the fiendish feelings, swelling in her breast.

"Where is Mrs. Vavasour," General Vavasour asked, preparing with hasty steps to cross the hall, and then the expression of the old woman's countenance seemed to strike him--for in a quick, breathless tone he exclaimed, "Is she not well? but I saw her at the window--I will go to her," and again he was on the point of proceeding, but was arrested by the voice of the Italian.

"General Vavasour," she said, in her slight foreign accent, which much added to the effect of the words uttered in the clear musical notes which were now raised above the pitch of her usually soft subdued tones, and could hardly fail to command General Vavasour's attention--"there is a painful task which I have undertaken to fulfil--a communication to relate which though fraught with agony and horror, it is necessary in justice to yourself that you should receive--ere you have seen *her* whom it concerns."

"Her whom it concerns--what mean you? is it of my wife? speak, in the name of Heaven," exclaimed General Vavasour, "what do you mean? Let me see her---why this mystery--is she ill?"

"No, not ill," continued the Italian in a solemn tone, "but--"

"Sir--sir," interrupted Mrs. Rivers in a quivering voice, having in vain attempted before to make herself heard. "Sir, as you

hope for mercy, judge nothing before you have seen her—hear her speak for herself, ere you listen to those, who, God forgive them! seem bent on fixing guilt on one, who, for all the proof they may conjure up against her, I who know them—”

“ Silence woman, would you uphold the cause of the guilty against that of the injured and the abused?” cried Nice sternly, turning a fierce indignant glance upon the trembling woman.

“ In the name of Heaven what does all this mean?” cried General Vavasour, much agitated, “ you will drive me mad---Guilty! what has that word to do with Francesca, with my wife?”

From the hall to the foot of the staircase the husband strode, and with a voice of thunder, he made the walls echo with the cry of “ Francesca,” “ Francesca!” Thrice indeed he called, but she who at the gentlest sound of that name breathed from his lips, was wont to

start like a young fawn into his presence, and if but an hour had separated them, fling herself into his arms with such perfect delight—where was now her light bounding step, that even at his call, it answered not? why did she not come as he had pictured to himself, her child in her arms, to bless his longing eyes? And she was not ill! she had seen him.

“ Guilt! proof! guilty!”

A faintness as of death stole over the brave man's heart---he grasped the railing of the staircase, and turned towards the pair a face of ghastly pallor.

Through his tightly pressed lips he muttered—

“ Why torture me thus, women? what said you about guilt—who dared to utter that word in connexion with the angel I left within these walls?”

“ It was to be *my* painful task, Signor General, so to do—and to break to you the

direful intelligence, that if once an angel, your wife has now fallen from her high estate."

"Heed her not, sir, heed her not," faltered Mrs. Rivers, but the wretched Vavasour seemed turned to stone upon the spot where he stood—his gaze fascinated by the glittering rattle-snake eyes of her, under whose influence he had been thus paralized.

Nice continued with increased boldness, as she thus beheld, that the best of the game was in her hands.

"But perhaps you will go with me into this room, and listen, if it so please you, to further particulars. And you, madam," she said, turning to Mrs. Rivers, "will be good enough to fellow, in order to gainsay, if you can, the truth of any fact that I may bring forward, as you seem inclined to give the lie to all my assertions. The truth, alas!" she continued, as she threw open the library door—"here indeed is a too sad voucher for it!"

The miserable man, stunned and bewildered,

mechanically entered the apartment, and the first object that met his eyes was the figure of his sister-in-law. She was standing in the middle of the sombre-room—her dull, distended eyes turned towards the door, as if she had been scared by the disturbance she had heard without---her cheeks pale and hollow, her countenance and deportment wearing the aspect of the most woe-begone misery, rendered still more remarkable by her neglected, almost, slovenly toilette.

Giulia stared at General Vavasour at first with something like expectation animating her countenance, but it had soon died away, and when with an exclamation of horror and dismay escaping his bloodless lips, he seized her hand convulsively, and gasped, “ Giulia, how is all this?” she shrunk back, put her hand to her head, and shuddered. In a hollow tone of anguish she muttered,

“ Ah, it is you—you have come too late—

you should not have left her here. It was not her fault—she was beautiful, and ever fated to be my ruin."

The wretched husband clasped his forehead with his hands ; he reeled as if he would have fallen, and sunk upon a seat that was near him, murmuring between his teeth,

" Gracious Heavens ! this is indeed more than I can bear."

" Lady de Crespigny," said Nice, in a voice of command, " you had better retire to your apartment—remaining here can but give encreased pain to yourself and General Vavasour."

The subdued Giulia passively obeyed. As the door closed upon her, General Vavasour raised his head, and turned his bloodshot eyes upon the Italian.

" And now," he said, in a hoarse voice, " let me hear all. But I swear by all that is sacred, if there be not truth in the maddening suggestion you have insinuated into my mind,

you had as well be a reptile at my feet, for your being a woman will not save you from a viper's fate!"

Mrs. Rivers again endeavoured to interpose, but her agitation seemed wholly to overpower her, and she was forced to sink upon a chair.

Nice, apparently unshaken by this startling address, stood up, with an unmoved countenance, adder-like indeed, prepared to goad by her sting the excited man to the madness necessary to the accomplishment of her fell design.

"Yes," she said, "mine is indeed a thankless, bitter office, and truly I should deserve the reptile's fate, if my heart were not moved with the deep indignation, which now burns within me at the wrongs of my most unhappy and betrayed friend—wrongs which have reduced her to the miserable state in which you now beheld her—the victim of as black and ungrateful treachery, as perhaps it was ever a woman's fate to bear."

The fiend began her recital. She invented no facts; hers was the great crime of taking truth into her poisonous mouth, and perverting it—from her lips it changed into black and venomous falsehood.

From the very moment of General Vavasour's departure she commenced the story, told how Claud Hamilton had returned to the *discensate* Francesca, remained with her alone, and so successfully beguiled her grief, that soon laughing and jesting had chased away her tears; that even Mrs. Rivers," and she turned to the old woman as if to challenge her to deny the truth, "had been shocked to find Mrs. Vavasour in a situation which was indiscreet, to say the least of it." Then she related the history of the *tête-à-tête* drive which had caused so much distress and annoyance to Lady de Crespigny. From that moment, she stated, that an alienation had taken place between the husband and wife, Mr. Hamilton having even treated his lady with harshness.

She described in the most pathetic terms the wretchedness of Giulia, how entirely all intercourse had ceased between them, Claud having passed the greatest part of the day in the eastern corridor. In short, for we will not follow the vile woman through every passage of her disgusting statement, every thing that a corrupt imagination could distort was said—the slightest incident twisted into damning proofs of guilt. She related how Francesca and Claud had been found by Giulia alone in the dusk of the evening, the indisposition of Mrs. Gordon having favored the secret interview. The circumstance upon which the wretch seemed to found the strongest basis of proof, was the fact of her having sent away the child and its attendants, immediately after the departure of Mrs. Gordon; thus ridding herself of all those who could in any manner be spies upon her actions. And then the dreadful finale was described in the most forcible terms ---the dark circumstance of that last night of

Claud's stay at Shirley Hall---the cloud of suspicion which overshadowed it---the key found in Francesca's chamber---her maid locked out of the corridor---the despairing accusations of the injured wife---and the immediate flight of the faithless husband from a home he had disgraced---dishonoured! "And not *alone*---would Mrs. Vavasour fain have allowed him to depart---No," Nice continued, "your wife, General Vavasour, threw herself in his path, and besought her *brother-in-law*, or rather her adoring *lover*, not to forsake her, but to allow her to accompany him; in compassion to her youth, she was however prevented from sinking deeper into the abyss of guilt, and has been retained under this roof in perfect seclusion. It is to be hoped, General Vavasour," the Italian added, "that the affair will spread no further than this mansion, though I have heard, may it not be true! that annexed to the paragraph, which made public the fact of my unfortunate friend, Lady de

Crespigny having returned to the faith of her mother, some mysterious allusions have been inserted, concerning domestic matters of such distressing import to herself, and disgrace to others whom they involved."

The creature paused. General Vavasour lifted up his head. He sat for a moment looking wildly round, with a face so changed, that even a movement of horror crept through the frame of the soul burdened Nice—and then he arose. He stood in all his height and strength of form, but all power seemed departed from his whole frame; it quivered like a reed.

"See her, sir! see her!" muttered a trembling voice—and he turned his glassy eyes upon the venerable, the usually stern housekeeper, who, with her head upon her hands, was rocking herself backwards and forwards, as if almost bewildered with distress.

"Will you see her, General?" said the Italian, "you will find Mrs. Vavasour, of course

much distressed, though in the state we would wish she should be, under the present circumstances. At first she was almost violent—but soon ceased to make any attempt at denial of her guilt, and has fallen into a kind of remorseful apathy, shuddering when your name, or that of the child is mentioned. The wretch indeed has much to answer for, who could have taken advantage of such almost childlike thoughtlessness, and turn it into vice, For we must all remember, General," and Nice's tone was that of deprecation, "that the unfortunate young creature was wedded when but a child in mind, and scarcely more than one in years; and that he had loved her even *from a child*—yes, and even at the time, when, for worldly considerations, he was induced to wed my poor unfortunate friend."

It was needless for the Italian to proceed any farther; the lion seemed now to shake off the trance of grief, which had overpowered his fury; his face glowed fiercely, he gnashed

his teeth, and Nice's triumph had arrived, the fruitful moment for which she had sold herself to iniquity. She listened to a fearful curse which rang with a hollow, dreadful sound through the apartment, called down upon the head of Claud Hamilton ! and then, striding to the door, Vavasour turned suddenly round, through his clenched teeth, apostrophising her in a tone which sounded like the hissing of a serpent.

“ Where is the vile scoundrel, the treacherous, cowardly villain ? ”

Music to her ear were these epithets. How Claud Hamilton, the honorable—the noble—the virtuous—would writhe beneath their sound, when soon they would be heard by him ! Her demon heart exulted !

“ In London, we suppose,” was the answer, “ but nothing since has been heard of him, or any of his family.”

A faint cry followed General Vavasour as he left the room, from poor Mrs. Rivers who attempted to totter after him, but it arrested him not.

On he strode across the hall, and stopped not till he stood upon the steps of the door—there, as if suffocated, he paused—and gasped for breath.

Then arose, as if to mock the wretched husband, the memory of that very day last year, aye, that *very day*, when he had borne off his lovely—his innocent—his childlike bride from that old court—and now! Oh! well might clouds, black as his despair, obscure the summer sky which had mocked him on his journey home! The burning tears fell fast from the strong man's eyes, whilst in his secret soul he swore, that the blood of his enemy should atone for the shame of this weakness—and yet, did that idea soothe his feelings, would even *his* blood allay the torture of his mind? Ah no!—*she* was lost to him and that was enough! even revenge had lost its sweetness—his soul was prostrate in its misery—its irremediable woe! What oceans of blood, could restore to him, his light—his life—his love!

No servant had crossed his path or met his sight, all around seemed as silent as the grave, as if as at the approach of an enraged lion, all had flown, and hidden themselves from the awful sight.

Looking round however, he discovered at a side door leading into the offices, the hired carriage in which he had arrived, and which had drawn up there immediately on his quitting it. The horses had not been taken off, but were ready to return to the post town whence they came. General Vavasour's luggage was still lying in a heap upon the ground, whilst his servant stood by, talking, surrounded by some few of the domestics of the house.

His master advanced a few steps towards them, and in a stern, hoarse voice called on his servant to have his boxes, placed upon the carriage that instant, and then to follow him, as he would walk on.

"Come!" he cried, in a tone like thunder, "what are you standing staring at? not an in-

stant's delay!" and on he strode half way across the grass grown courtway.

But what sound was that which, as it were, rooted him to the spot, and caused his whole frame to quiver, like the sturdy oak racked by the tempest? Had the awful thunder burst in fearful clamour from the dark sky above his head, or an earthquake shaken the ground beneath his feet? No, it was but the sound of a human voice---a woman's voice---or rather it might have seemed that of a spirit of the air---so sweetly musical was the wailing, woe-ful strain in which the cry of "Ernest, Ernest," fell upon his ear.

He lifted not his eyes—he answered not—nay after the first shock, it seemed but to goad him on to his purpose, for he sprang forwards towards the gate of the court, the cry swelling as he did so, into a shriek loud and piercing.

"Oh, Ernest, my own Ernest—Ernest—Ernest," it cried, and then a scream was

heard, so piercing in its agony, that it thrilled through every fibre of his frame.

Vavasour paused, but ere the echo of that cry had died away—just as with a sudden impulse of torturing agony, he had turned and lifted up his starting eye-balls—what object was it that appeared before his sight? what was that white figure which seemed to be about to fly from the perilous point, on which it was for a moment poised--the jutting ledge of an upper window! Before his dizzy sight could distinguish the object, the figure had darted forwards, and fluttering for an instant in the air, fell as if it were a large snow drift, to the ground, a few paces from his feet, and lay darkened by the shower of jetty hair which floated around it. With a faint exclamation he darted towards the prostrate form, raised it from the ground, and once more held in his arms his own Francesca! Yes, he pressed her to his heart--his lips to her cold brow! He might love her again, for he

thought that she was dead! She was not more lost to him, than she was a moment before—her last—last words had at least been to call upon his name---her last act, to follow him, even unto death! How fervently could he have wished that moment to be his last, but his brain began to reel—he staggered forward, and bore his burden into the house. .

CHAPTER XX.

“ What will not woman, gentle woman dare,
When strong affection stirs her spirit up ? ”

SOUTHEY.

“ Oh wretch without a tear—without a thought,
Save joy above the ruin she has wrought,

* * * * *

May the strong curse of crushed affections light,
Back on thy bosom with reflected blight,

* * * * *

Look on thy earthly victims, and despair.”

BYRON.

IT had indeed been the poor Francesca who was seen by General Vavasour on his first arrival, standing at the window. Day after day, she

had passed, in a state of hopeless dejection, every succeeding one seeming but to increase the deep and mighty shadow which had gathered over her young heart; she was indeed like a flower on which a sudden blight had fallen. Her mind could not have endured much longer this state of wretchedness, and sometimes a vague thought of terror would flit over her thoughts, that her senses must forsake her.

If Ernest came not!—and yet if he were to arrive, how could she bear that moment?—Ah! soon she knew full well! At the very first sound of the wheels of the carriage which bore her husband to the hall, something seemed to tell her, that it was he!—and, as when by a sudden touch the spell of a magician is dissolved, and the victim he had bound is let free—so did Francesca start up, and flying to the window feel that the hour was come, and she was delivered from the hands of her persecutors.

And where was the dark dread which had

solately overshadowed her heart? All, all seemed to melt away like the snow, at the approach of spring—all seemed but the dark dream of a trance, which in her husband's arms would forever be dispelled; for conscious innocence once more asserted its truthful power—Love—joyful, confiding Love, alone swelled her heart. She had seen his outstretched form—his upraised face—and as if that sight were bliss enough for the moment, she had stood entranced, with outstretched arms, till the carriage nearly touched the gateway, and then she had flown to the door in ecstasy!

But it resisted her endeavours. She shook it with wild impatience. She flew to the bell—One furious peal and the old, worn out rope came down with the impatient shock. Again she darted to the door, and giddy, panting, with distended eyes, knelt and placed her ear to the key hole. Some one surely would come and open it, she thought; perhaps he himself—her breath was suspended, and her

listening ear strove to catch the first sound of his approaching footsteps.

What! no sound?—all silent? He comes not,---and then a maddening thought glanced across her mind.

What if they should stop him---her enemies? ah! she remembered them now!---And if they should pour into his ear the dark dread poison, from the effects of which her life---her reason had almost been destroyed!—

He would ask for his wife and child---and she not there to cling to his neck, to tell him that the dreadful tale they would fain induce him to believe---was false! Those dreadful words, even though he believed them not, would they not stab him to the heart? And then, when sinking almost with despair---her name had rung upon her ear. He called her---and she could not obey that call. She sprang up, and renewed her useless though desperate efforts to gain deliverance; between every attempt, calling upon her husband's name ---praying to her God in agony! till totally

exhausted she sat upon the ground in woeful despair.

A perfect silence now reigned around, and time passed away in this death-like stillness ; still Francesca lay motionless and benumbed, moaning occasionally like a wounded fawn.

Thus she remained until her husband's voice again sounded upon her in the court below. She sat up, flung back her hair and listened--every word was distinctly wafted to her ear, by the air, through the open window. She flew to it in an instant, and then had the agonizing cries which burst from her lips, been heard by General Vavasour. The poor young wife saw her husband departing.

Suddenly her door was opened, and with a shriek, in which there mingled a sound of joy, she had darted from the window towards it, prepared to fly to follow her husband. But the door was shut ere she reached it--and, with her back to it, stood the

detested Nice—her eyes glaring with menacing fierceness upon her, as she called upon Francesca to be silent.

But Francesca saw her not. In an instant she turned, and that dreadful shriek then resounded through the apartment, and the form of Francesca vanished from the sight of the astounded, guilty Italian—through the open lattice! Nice stood rooted to the spot—a cold chill creeping over her frame.

“Am I then a murderer?” she exclaimed, and staggering to the window, she scarcely dared to look forth and behold the consequences of her unblest deeds; for on her head, conscience whispered, would lie the guilt; if harm had befallen the innocent creature whom she had goaded to the desperate deed.

Nice heard the faint exclamation of General Vavasour, and she heard the hurried feet of the servants, some of whom, beholding the catastrophe, hastened to the spot.

She recalled with an effort, her presence of

mind, remembering that she must not now forsake herself in this extremity, but bear out her cause even more steadfastly. There was no retracting now—one yielding step, and disgrace and infamy would be her portion, and her enemy triumph over her. But no!—and a murderous hope brightened her eyes, which truly stamped her brow with the mark of Cain, though her hands might, perchance, have been innocent of the death of that young victim.

“Yes, let her die!” she muttered, “and on his head, will the curse of the husband fall — To him be attributed the catastrophe!—on him be visited all the contumely, the scorn and horror of the world!—Never can the cloud be dispersed, which, for ever, must darken the horizon of his future existence; the shame will rest for ever on his name. The memory of the dead — the sight of the living, will wither his heart—and he shall learn to feel that it was her, whom he scorned, who has woven the spell—who has baptized him with

the curse — although he has no power to *prove* that she has done it."

These thoughts re-kindled the spirit in her black heart, as Nice proceeded to join the group, who, in dismay and consternation, surrounded the husband, as he bore into the house, the senseless form of his young wife. Mrs. Rivers had staggered into the hall and swooned away at the sight.

"Take her from him!" cried Nice, in a commanding voice, as General Vavasour leant, as if for support, against a table, "do you not see that he is fainting?" But, as one of the men servants stepped forwards to obey the order, the General sternly waved him away, making a sign that he wished some one to go on, and shew the way to the nearest apartment; and Francesca's own maid and Martuccia preceding him — he followed with his burden, and laid her on the bed in the room, from which she had lately made her daring escape. And there the unhappy man

stood gazing on the senseless form, as if he could scarcely comprehend the meaning of the sight. The attendants, having, in a degree, recovered their presence of mind, began to try all the usual restoratives, in order to revive the insensible Francesca; but so unsuccessful were they in their efforts, that it was really imagined that life had departed, during the two hours that elapsed, ere the medical man could be procured. On his arrival, however, after minute examination of the patient, and having heard every particular of the accident, he proceeded to apply the remedies proper for restoring suspended animation.

General Vavasour by this time had sunk on a seat by the bed-side.

The Doctor pronounced Mrs. Vavasour's present state of insensibility as proceeding from a concussion, which she must have received on the head. No bone was broken, nor scarcely any other injury inflicted save a few bruises the height of the window being twenty feet from the ground,

it was strange that the injury had not been greater. But Francesca's form was so buoyant and agile, and from her earliest childhood she had been so completely a Fenella in such exploits, that probably it was only when a few yards from the ground, that she had lost her equilibrium, and her light person had fallen on the grassy side of the court—her head however striking—as it seemed, from a few drops of blood--on the stone flags beyond.

Ere the doctor left Francesca's side, the pulse had again beat—a faint breathing moved the feather placed before her lips; and the color of life began to dawn upon her cheek, but still there was no consciousness in her expression. It would be long perhaps ere her senses would recover the stunning effects of the fall. Nothing further could now be done; perfect quiet must be observed around her. The doctor promised to remain in the house during the night. On his quitting the chamber, it was nine o'clock.

General Vavasour then arose like a tall spectre from the seat which, concealed by the curtains of the bed, he had occupied, and waving his hand to the attendants, said in a subdued but stern tone,

" Go, all of you---nothing more can be done
—I will watch alone."

There was no resisting his commanding voice, they obeyed him.

Vavasour then locked the door, and was alone with that pale, still form.

CHAPTER XXII.

“ Oh, fate—take not away thy heavy hand
Death is the fairest cover for her shame
That may be wished for.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“ Help me
To pluck this crawling serpent from my heart
Ah me for pity!—what a dream was here.”

IBID.

THE evening light had been shut out, and a dim lamp was placed upon a distant table. General Vavasour seized it, and with subdued footsteps approached the bed, and held it, so

that the light fell full upon the face of her,
who lay so still, so deathlike!

“ To look upon thy beauty, nothing further!”
he might well have said, such were his thoughts,
“ for you are *dead*—dead indeed to me—ah!
why not die, ere I had lost you—for then I
might have still called you my own, though
death had sent your faithful spirit from me
for a while; I could still have folded you in
my arms, and pressed cold kisses on your
cheek—but now—”

And did the husband really think his erring
wife was dead, or did he try to cheat his heart
into the belief, that he might still remain by
her side—still gaze upon her, who, if alive, he
must turn from as a serpent? No! it was in all
the frozen beauty of recent death she lay,
but without its horror—for soul still breathed
from that face; the mind had not perished
though veiled for a time—It

“ Had wander'd from its dwelling, and her eyes
They had not their own lustre, but the look
Which is not of the Earth.”

They were now indeed open, but fixed on vacancy. Vavasour continued to gaze, pleasing himself with the delusion, and then replacing the lamp, reseated himself by Francesca's side, and there he remained during the whole of that long night, only occasionally admitting the attendants, to execute the directions of the doctor, after which again he dismissed them, and resumed his lonely watch, like a wretched mourner over a tomb. The intelligence of the catastrophe had been carried to the vicarage. Mr. Seymour had immediately repaired to Shirley, and this time without opposition effected an entrance into the house; he was accompanied by the nurse, who would no longer be restrained from hurrying to her beloved young mistress, but even she, was only allowed to enter the chamber at intervals, for General Vavasour's commands that he should be left alone, extended even to her. Mrs. Rivers was cheered by hearing what was going forward in the sick room, and was full of sanguine hopes that if the dear

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when he dreamt that a serpent had woven itself around him, and stung his breast, and he awoke with a fearful start.

It had been in a kind of lethargy, that Francesca had lain, since animation had returned to her frame, for though she did not seem to comprehend, or distinguish the objects which met her sight, the doctor and attendants had perceived in her condition, on their last visit, favourable symptoms—they had left her in a natural, gentle slumber, upon which they built some hopes, and it was true that she was reviving.

A deep sigh at length heaved from her breast, the eye-lids were raised, the orbs they had hidden resumed their natural light, and in them, was the expression of one, who awakens from a dream, and ponders on its reality or delusion.

A deep breathing seemed at length to attract her attention, and she turned her head, though with some difficulty ; she gazed at first wildly

around, and then a quiet smile stole over her features, she slowly raised herself into a sitting posture. It was evident she felt her head strange and dizzy, but in another instant her arms were thrown round the form of her husband, which had sunk against the side of the bed. She laid her head upon his bosom, lifting her eyes upwards to catch a glimpse of his face, and then closing them with a placid smile of enjoyment.

Colonel Vavasour, as we said, awoke with a start, and feeling indeed the gentle imprisonment which constrained him, after a bewildered gaze, began to be aware of its real nature; for without releasing himself from her embrace, or removing her head nestled on his bosom, Francesca again raised her languid eyes towards his face with a tender, imploring smile, as if she would have said—

“ Let me remain thus !”

An icy chill crept over the frame of the unhappy man. For a moment he remained as

One who, under the influence of the nightmare is unable to arouse himself and shake off the weight which weighs him down to suffocation; he gasped in agony, and then suddenly grasping in each hand one of those slender arms, twined round him, with one strong effort, he had released himself, and laid the poor Francesca back upon her pillow.

A faint cry of terror broke from her lips, but she lay quite still where her husband had placed her, only murmuring in faint, piteous tones,

“ Oh, Ernest—Ernest—how cruel !”

General Vavasour had arisen, he was himself again; that is to say, he felt as he had done before the accident, which had melted away all his bitter feelings, and given place to tender, relenting, despairing tenderness; now he was once more the wronged, the dis-honored husband, and so terrible was the expression of his countenance, as he cast his

eyes, the last time, upon her face, that the look seemed fraught with as much fatal meaning as that which greeted the waking Desdemona before she met her fate, and though recollection was still dim in the poor young creature's mind, as her gaze fell upon his face, a shriek burst from her lips.

He looked upon her as on an object that was to inflame those feelings of vengeance, which he thirsted to wreak upon the head of her destroyer, and then he turned, he crossed the room. He heard another shriek—a noise; Francesca had thrown herself from the bed, but weak and giddy had fallen to the ground ere she could reach him.

The attendants, who were ever watching, on hearing the first cry rushed to the door, and demanded admittance.

General Vavasour now opened it, and they entered. He would have passed on, but Mrs. Rivers placed herself before him.

“Sir,” she said, “are you going to leave

her in that state?" and seizing his arm sternly, she pointed to Francesca, who, raised up in the nurse's arms, lay again senseless, stained by the blood which the exertion had caused to flow from her temples, to which leeches had been applied. "If you go now," she added without hearing what *her friends* have to say, "though you so willingly gave ear to her *enemies*, on your soul rest that innocent blood!"

"Innocent!" he murmured confusedly, "innocent! prove it, woman, or stop me not thus idly."

"They have killed her, the wretches! my pure, innocent child!" wailed the old nurse, at that moment, General Vavasour's eyes turned wildly upon Francesca.

"Innocent—pure!" he cried, "why mock me with those words?"

"Mock you, sir! it is you who mock yourself, if you can look at this sweet child's face and believe her otherwise," said the nurse, weeping indignantly.

"Child! yes," Vavasour murmured bitterly.
"I married a child, and relied upon her weak
unstable love, and must now take the conse-
quences."

"Weak love!" exclaimed the nurse, "very
weak indeed that love, which made her peril
her life to follow you, ungrateful as you are!
nay, yours is the weak love, which could so
easily believe the lies of a villainous Italian,
yes, as soon as you heard them, and will not
even ask a question of her friends, who would
at once clear her. Sir, for my own part
I would tell you at once to be gone, and
welcome, if I did not know that it would kill
her outright, for you do not deserve to look
upon this angel face again—no, nor her baby's
either, for doubting her for a moment."

This blunt, frank, indignant outbreak of the
enraged old nurse, seemed to strike General
Vavasour, for a change came over his counte-
nance, and he listened with gasping attention,

though he turned even paler than he had been before.

Mrs. Rivers, in the meantime, opened the door softly, against which she had been standing, and beckoned to some one without. Vavasour turned his eyes as a sound by his side met his ears, and they fell on the pretty frightened face of one holding an infant in her arms, whose low crowing had attracted his attention.

Vavasour started at the sight and stepped back.

"General Vavasour," Gertrude Seymour said, looking pale with alarm, "will you allow my husband to speak to you for a moment? My poor Francesca," she exclaimed, turning her eyes upon her, and bursting into tears, "they have indeed treated you cruelly!"

The poor young creature had recovered from her fainting fit, but lay supported in the nurse's arms as if unconscious of all that passed around her.

"They have treated you shamefully, they

have much to answer for who have caused all this!" exclaimed Gertrude. "Colonel Vavasour, *will* you go and speak to my husband? but first let me introduce you to your son, though truly it is a sad time to do so. Poor Francesca! how she longed for the moment! but the poor little fellow has already been too long deprived of his parents; he must wait no longer."

There is something very irresistible in its power, particularly on the feelings of a man, the voice and manner of a gentlewoman, when she comes in the midst of trouble and affliction, to melt the strong heart which conflicting emotions have petrified. Mr. Seymour probably fully estimated and understood the influence of female persuasion, when he entreated his wife to take upon herself this mission, in order to prepare the way for his subsequent interview.

General Vavasour stooped and kissed the beautiful babe, and whilst he did so the scald-

ing tears fell from his eyes, but they were of a softer nature than those he had last shed.

"How could she send it away?" the father murmured, in a choked voice, as he bent over his boy.

But the old nurse had caught the words, though they were spoken so low.

"How could she send it away?" she exclaimed, "because she did not wish to see *your child* blighted, and be-spirited as she sweet angel has been, by the evil-eyed demons, who had got possession of this house, that's *how*, sir, and you may thank me, for it was I who persuaded her to send it away, that you have a child preserved from this nest of devils, and you may thank yourself for all the mischief they have done her; for if it had not been for her love and duty towards you, for which forsooth she is well rewarded! she might have been persuaded to get clear out of their clutches also. Bring the baby here, Mrs. Seymour; she wants to see it."

Francesca's eyes had opened unobserved at the sound of the infant's voice, and turned slowly upon it. She had watched her husband's movements, but seemed not to comprehend what was said, but only to see what passed between the father and his child, and that without any expression of emotion, but with broken-hearted apathy. After General Vavasour had raised his head, from looking at the infant, she stretched out her arms faintly towards it, and moved her lips with a wan, gentle smile.

General Vavasour started at the nurse's last words; the child was taken towards its mother; he stood and gazed with a look of agony.

"Where—where?" gasped Francesca, looking up with a wild eager look, as the child was held to her. "Where—where, dear Gertrude, where? did he kiss it—let me put my lips just—there!" she gasped with difficulty.

"No, here, Francesca, only here—my life—

my love!" and General Vavasour was by her side—had snatched her in his arms—had pressed his lips to her lips—her cheeks—her brow, with passionate fervour.

"There, Francesca!" he cried, "and if I find they have wronged you, and have made me a villain like themselves, nay worse! women or devils be they, they shall rue the hour, when their tongues poured forth the poisonous scandal."

"If—if they have wronged me!" cried Francesca—"Ah! still that *if*! Oh, Ernest, Ernest, are you too against me?"

"Well, they *have* wronged you, angel! Here take her!" he exclaimed, looking round to the nurse. "Nay, cling not to me, Francesca, I shall return soon—never—never more to part from thee again."

"Nay, do not go!" she murmured, still clinging to him. "Take not vengeance on a creature so vile, so far beneath your ire!"

"Fear not, dearest—I am calm now!"

and he placed her in the nurse's arms, then turning to Gertrude, with his own courteous, dignified manner, said, "Now, Mrs. Seymour, I shall be happy to see your husband."

He accompanied her from the apartment, Mrs. Rivers following them.

CHAPTER XXII.

DOGUE. -- So young, so beautiful, so good, so pure.
To suffer this, and be unavenged.

ANGELICA.--I am too well avenged, for you still love
me

And trust, and honor me, and all men knew
That you are just, and I am true; what more
Could I require, or you command?

MARINO FALLIERO.

She's gone--a manifest serpent by her sting
Discovered in the end--till now concealed--
So let her go.

SAMSON AGONISTES.

IN spite of the dauntless audacity of the
malignant Italian's heart, it had, at length,
began to quail. The very moment had arrived—

She had seen General Vavasour on the point departing—filled with the vindictive passions of an outraged man—determined to insult—to brand with opprobrium—with his own hand to annihilate, the man, whom he supposed had so basely injured him. The wretch revelled in the idea of all that Claud Hamilton was about to endure, from the maddened state of fury, into which she had worked the feelings of the unhappy husband. The unforeseen catastrophe of Francesca's attempted escape, had, at once, overturned the well-arranged scheme of revenge, for which, she had sunk her soul into —

A pit of ink, that the wide sea
Hath drops too few to wash away.

She began to feel misgivings, for suddenly, the aspect of affairs seemed to assume for her, a threatening view. The husband, instead of shrinking with loathing from the wife, who had been represented to him so

vile, was seated now, by her bed-side absorbed in grief, and round the aspersed Francesca, rallied all her most devoted friends. That same evening, Mr. Seymour, in all the dignity and authority of his sacred office, had claimed the power of acting, in the absence of his brother-in-law, Lady de Crespigny, having been ascertained to be in a state, very nearly bordering upon mental aberration.

From the account Mrs. Rivers gave of her condition, he had authorized the physician who was in attendance upon Mrs. Vavasour, to visit the Baroness and his report decided Mr. Seymour's subsequent actions.

With decision and firmness, he gave his orders, and appointed those to watch over the unfortunate Giulia, whom the physician selected for the office—strictly excluding all communication with the priest and his niece or any of the Italians; and for this purpose,

she was moved into other apartments into which they could not penetrate.

Mr. Seymour had become aware, only within the few last days, of the really dreadful state of the interior of Shirley Hall—the condition to which Francesca was reduced, the priest's abode there, and the influence which he had gained over Giulia's religious opinions. Urgent letters had been written both to the Hamiltons and Mrs. Gordon, and until their arrival, he had determined to remain at Shirley, and to act as his conscience dictated.

The priest and his niece now began to feel that their reign was over. Like many wretched mischievous spirits, who, for a time, are allowed seemingly to prosper in their sins, they had over-acted their parts and frustrated their designs, by two flagrant audacity.

Nice saw by a glance of her keen eyes, that she was suspected—that all those whom

she had hitherto overawed by the strange dominion which she had the power of gaining over minds—a sort of satanic influence which she exercised with such extraordinary effect—were now her open enemies. Her influence over the Baroness was at an end, for she was no longer allowed to see her. Even Martuccia — her country woman and ally—scowled gloomily upon her, and she well knew that woman had it in her power to throw light upon many a foul and dark transaction.

But to return to General Vavasour. He followed Gertrude into the presence of her husband who left them together.

Mrs. Rivers, however, was shortly summoned, and also Martuccia, who was detained for some time. Soon after, Gertrude, who was waiting with impatient interest, for the issue of the discussion, was admitted by her husband, and found him alone with General Vavasour, who sat pale and completely exhausted; he had been persuaded to take some refreshment, which Mrs. Rivers had gone to procure.

"Mrs. Seymour," he said, with a faint quivering on his pale lips, at the same time stretching out his hand to her, "I am thoroughly ashamed to look upon you, and can scarcely hope for your forgiveness. To forgive myself, I can never be able, for having listened for a moment, to an accusation so foul, of one so good, so excellent! and from the lips of such a wretch!" he paused in great agitation.

"General Vavasour," said Gertrude, coloring, and drawing herself up somewhat proudly, "you have, indeed, done us wrong. To imagine for a moment, that a Hamilton could act so villainously—and *my brother* above all people—our noble, honorable Claud! too good, too pure in mind, for this wicked, this deceitful, ungrateful world! Even to have only once looked into his countenance, I should have thought would have been sufficient — but, having lived with him — having known him so well as you have done—and yet to doubt him! and from what? the foul slander of one of the worst of women."

"Hush—hush—dear Gertrude!" interposed her husband, seeing that his young wife's sisterly indignation was rising intemperately, "remember that an insect has made a lion mad, ere now!"

"Nay, Mrs. Seymour, go on, I thoroughly deserve all that you can say. I thank you for your just censure—you cannot be too severe on my folly, madness, cruelty, not only towards your brother, but that sweet angel."

"Well," she continued, "I have now done. I will only add, that it is a strong proof that I was quite right, in always ascribing a satanic influence to that dreadful Italian's eyes—for that they must have exerted that power on you, General Vavasour, is very certain, in their having been able to deceive a mind so exalted as your own—with that excuse, we will all, I am sure, forgive you; and if the sufferings that wretch has made you endure, will ensure the downfall of the sorceress's power, they will, indeed, have been the means of bringing a blessing

upon this house, although, I fear, for her chief victim, poor Giulia, the deliverance comes too late."

General Vavasour having swallowed hastily a few mouthfuls, arose with an eager, anxious expression of countenance, saying that he must go to Francesca, and left the room.

He repaired to her apartment, and found her lying upon her bed, and she received him with the same blissful, angelic smile.

"Are we in Heaven, Ernest?" she said, some hours after, as she lay in the dim twilight with her head upon the bosom of him, who had so lately spurned her from that resting place. She was in a kind of blissful stupor, for she had talked much, and her head was still confused and somewhat wandering. Vavasour bent over her, and the hot tears fell upon her cheek.

"Ah, no! they do not weep in Heaven!" she murmured, putting her hand to her head,

"Oh! I remember now, but I thought I dreamt that I had been in a dark grave, and I awakened so happy, that I fancied I must be in Heaven."

Presently the sound of carriage wheels were heard hastily grinding over the stone court.

"That is Claud, no doubt," Francesca exclaimed, "Poor, dear, injured Claud! Go to him, Ernest — meet him at once, and stretch out a hand of kindness to that noble, generous, unhappy friend."

General Vavasour instantly obeyed, and was in the hall to receive the Hamiltons. Walking straight up to Claud, he took his arm in silence, and led him across into the library. There the proud man humbled himself, by relating the whole history of the two last days —all—all was told—and he threw himself upon the indulgence of the friend he had so maligned.

"I have wronged you, Hamilton," he said,

countenance upon us
Vavasour thought it
Gertrude, have marvelled
have doubted that he
is needless to detail all
such men were met
after, Mr. Seymour
accompanied by Mrs.
eastern corridor. Even
but they found all vacant
at the extremity, in which
first gave a specimen
found locked, but on examination
also unoccupied. Mr. Seymour
it necessary to give up
door from which she had

certainly both the priest and his niece had absconded, and with them it was ascertained, the strong box had also disappeared in which the bosom friend was known to keep the golden fruits she had taken care to secure, in order to be prepared for a time such as the present moment.

It was proposed by some, that the two base beings who had wrought such misery on the house, should be pursued—but it ended by their being left to themselves—

“ That lowest depth
Of human baseness.”

They had stung the good and noble, but

“ Things like them must sting
And higher beings suffer—’tis the charter
Of life!”

and so it seemed. The wicked Nice had truly left a sting, the effects of which it would have rejoiced her fiendish heart to behold; for it

caused a severe pang to the heart of her enemy.

To the feeling nature of Cland, the state of his unhappy wife was a source of deep anguish. So poignantly did it affect his feelings, that his mother and friends endeavoured to persuade him to absent himself from her presence, but Claud's answer to this proposition was—

“ *Never!*—what I swore at the altar it was ever my intention to fulfil; and this is the last moment that I should choose in which to desert my poor wife.”

And he would sit with poor Giulia's hand pressed in his, her eyes fixed immovably on his face, on hers a peaceful smile of enjoyment whilst he talked to her in a tone of tender cheerfulness, which seemed to soothe the affliction of her mind, although it failed to remove the thick veil of melancholy which appeared to enshroud it.

Her feelings, however, were peace and happiness compared to those, which during every period of her blighted existence had visited her bosom; those passions which had for ever

turned her life into a state of torture, seemed blunted, the past remembered, as it seemed, only as a faint dream. When they led her to the presence of her sister, in the hope of arousing her to some emotion, telling her that she had been ill, she calmly kissed her forehead, and when Francesca threw her arms around her neck in an agony of grief, at the state in which she was reduced, Giulia shewed no signs of emotion.

Nice, strange to say, she never mentioned. In short, as long as Claud was in her sight nothing else seemed to stir her mind.

They removed Giulia as soon as possible from the gloomy walls, which had indeed been her mental grave. Claud took her to London and she was placed under the first medical advice; but it was soon discovered to be a case which baffled all the best physician's art; they could but recommend constant change of scene, and tender, judicious treatment; but it would require time, and patience:—

“ To cleanse the foul bosom of that perilous stuff,”

which had been so long collecting, to weigh down the mind to its distressful state.

Claud from that time devoted himself to his painful and trying task in a manner most exemplary, nor was he unaided in his duty of attendance on the suffering Giulia.

Mrs. Hamilton considered no sacrifice on her part too great, for her son ; she could never cease to accuse herself, of having been the cause of drawing upon him the unhappy lot which was now his portion — and Mrs. Gordon also gave herself up to the service of her suffering niece.

It may be imagined how that attached aunt was dismayed and agonised, on hearing the dreadful events which had immediately followed her departure from Shirley Hall. She had however the comfort of seeing Francesca soon sufficiently recovered, to depart with her adoring husband and loving child for Paris—the sun of her happiness, being only rendered the more brilliant, from its temporary eclipse—dimmed only by the sorrows of others !

CONCLUSION.

" 'Tis she—'tis she—I know her now,
I know her by the evil eye
That aids her envious treachery."

GIAOUR.

" Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished ; neither have they any more a portion of any thing that is done under the sun."

A YEAR passed away—a period spent in a melancholy tour on the continent, by the suffering Giulia and her husband. We now find them at Genoa, where they had just been

joined by the Vavasours, who were anxious to take their share in alleviating as much as possible the melancholy duties of poor Claud, which were daily becoming more trying ; for whilst the mental powers of the poor invalid remained much in the same state of apathy, her physical strength was rapidly declining.

It was a comfort, though at the same time it rendered her state more touching to the feelings of her friends, that ever since this sad mental crisis, her disposition had taken a tone of gentleness and amiability ; of which in her former life there had been some occasional glimpses, athwart the stern surface, which had gathered over the character of poor Giulia.

It was strange to see her attach herself to the sister, who had been through life the object of her jealous antipathy—never so happy as when seated, drinking in, as it were, the sweet music of her voice, gazing on the loveliness of her face ; never so easily won to

smile, as by the exertions of Francesca to amuse her mind by soothing attentions, or endearing tenderness.

It was at Florence that the concluding events of this history took place.

Claud and Sir Ernest Vavasour, for by this title he was then known, were strolling, the evening after their arrival, on the banks of the Arno. They enquired to whom a Palazzo belonged, which from its beauty had attracted their attention, and were told that its possessor was the Marchese di Lante.

Claud, starting at the sound of that name, asked some further questions, and discovered that in that Palazzo dwelt the abominable Nice Cellini, who now lived a life of infamy, as mistress to the Marchese.

This discovery made them determine to leave so odious a proximity immediately; the villa which had been taken by Mr. Hamilton being within a very short distance from the Palazzo. On returning home, a short time

after, in a boat, another passed them, and Claud had just time to catch a glance of a pair of never-to-be-forgotten eyes, which shone like a flash of lightning across his sight, the glance being followed by a ringing, mocking laugh which came distinct and clear over the waters, accompanied by the words,

“ I wish Claud Hamilton joy, of his *mad wife* !”

* * * * *

They arrived at the villa. Francesca rushed out to meet them—pale and trembling—dismay and alarm painted on her countenance ! Giulia, she said, had experienced a fearful shock, and had been insensible ever since ; the doctor was with her.

Claud hastened to the poor sufferer, and Francesca related to Sir Ernest the particulars of the event which had occurred in his absence.

Giulia had been seated on the terrace which overlooked the river. Francesca had left her for a moment and entered the house, an attendant remaining by her side. From her she learnt that almost immediately after a boat had approached; when the woman saw that Lady de Crespigny was the object of the particular observation of a lady who sat in this boat, and saw her give orders that it should be rowed close under the terrace. This was done — and then she commanded the boatmen to pause.

The female then stood up erect before the Baroness, fixed her terrible eyes upon her, and spoke some words in Italian.

The attendant said she should never forget the expression of Lady de Crespigny's countenance, as she gazed, as if fascinated, on the face of the stranger, then uttered a piercing shriek, and fell backwards in a fainting fit.

This shock had indeed snapped the last frail cord which bound the sinking Giulia to existence.

The next morning she breathed her last sigh, strange to relate, thus receiving her death-blow, from the hands of her, who had ever been her bane, “her Bosom Friend;” and still, stranger, and more awful still, the sequel! As if the fate of that fiendish being was now accomplished, as if her own destruction was to follow close upon that of her victim -- whom it seemed, to be her evil destiny to destroy -- that night, the villa in which Giulia was gasping forth her dying breath, was illumined by the flames, which were consuming the palazzo of the Marchese di Lante. The same sun which shone upon the pale corpse of Giulia, mocked, with its bright rays, the blackened ruins of that once fair edifice.

A few days afterwards, during which time, the wicked being—who had doubtless brought this judgment upon the roof which sheltered her—lingered a disfigured and tortured sufferer, then expired agonized and despairing, in a convent to which she had been removed. A

lowly grave covered the mutilated remains of her, whose name can only be remembered as—

“ The climax of all scorn,
* * * * *
Exalted o'er her less abhorred compeers,
And festering in the infamy of years.”

Her victim lies not far off, though beneath a marble tomb, watered, ere left, by those who laid her there, with many a pitying tear—her birth-place, thereby, proving also that of her burial.

Thus ends the fatal history of “ the Bosom Friends.” Of those who are connected with their dark existence, we must speak a few parting words.

Claud Hamilton’s after life had every prospect of happiness. With regard to fortune, he was rich; for on his marriage with the unfortunate Giulia, with a liberality for which she was ever conspicuous, she had settled upon him, unconditionally, a large portion of unentailed property. It is to be hoped that one so fitted to enjoy the happiness of domestic life, might

noble being,
the past.

Francesca
her happy co-

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gloomy walls
to re-echo wit-
often made n-
place became :
cursed."

Even Mrs. I
move from th-

remnant of her days in the cheerful atmosphere of the de Crespigny's seat in Berkahire, where she was considered by the young Baroness and her husband, in the light of a much respected friend. Gladly too did Mr. Seymour and his fair Gertrude, accept in exchange for the living near Shirley, one close to the Park-gate of the Berkshire residence. Gertrude had endeared herself much to the Vavasours, and they ever remembered with gratitude her warm-hearted, affectionate conduct to Francesca during her season of distress.

Mr. Seymour rose rapidly in his profession, and the daughter whose married lot Mrs. Hamilton had so deeply deplored, is now the wife of one of the Church's most eminent prelates !

Yes ! Shirley Hall was quite deserted as a residence—

“ Unheard their clock repeats its hours
Cold is the hearth within their bow'rs
And should we thither roam,
It echoes and its empty tread,
Would sound like voices from the dead !”

creasing dilapid

" And there i
Worn, but un
All tenantless,
Or holding da









